

# **Women's Suffrage in Asia**

Gender, nationalism and democracy

**Edited by Louise Edwards and  
Mina Roces**

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# Women's Suffrage in Asia

This book explores the gendered histories of democracy, governance and citizenship in Asia within the context of the global women's suffrage movement. Including chapters on Japan, India, Indonesia, China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Korea, Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii, the book analyses women's experiences of politics and their negotiations for greater access to power and representation. It explains why the history of suffrage is neglected in the various nationalist historiographies and untangles the connections between culture, religion, nationalism and colonialism in the context of women's struggles for democratic rights.

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**For our grandmothers  
Who lived through this remarkable era in women's history**

**Annie Margaret Edwards [née Stuart] (1910–1985)  
Amy Alfreda Lee [née Wheeler] (1908–1998)**

**Inocencia Reyes Rocas (1890–1982)  
Caridad Morente Pineda (1906–)**





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Louise Edwards and Mina Roces  
Canberra and Sydney, November 2003



# 1 Introduction

## Orienting the global women's suffrage movement

*Louise Edwards and Mina Roces*

From its inception, women's struggle for the vote was explicitly global. Each national women's suffrage campaign directed its attention to a 'national government', but at the same time these suffragists also saw the power in drawing upon international comparisons and international energies. In this regard, women's suffrage campaigns were simultaneously national and global. Women activists exchanged information, tactics and advice with each other across the seas and in multiple languages. They applauded victories and mourned losses along with their sisters in distant nations. When the British suffrage activists smashed shop windows in Bond Street on 1 March 1912, Chinese women activists celebrated their audacity and within 20 days had performed the same act on parliament windows in Nanjing. In 1917, America's women's suffragists challenged their Senate to match China, where they erroneously thought women had won suffrage rights.<sup>1</sup> Asia's women's suffrage activists imagined their 'national' citizenship within an increasingly 'international' conversation of nationhood.

Suffrage activists from the 1890s and the 1920s saw their campaign as international. After all, gender discrimination knew no national boundaries. Women were women the world over and recognition of a common enemy – patriarchy – forged global alliances well before globalisation was a household word. Male power and privilege was firmly embedded in a wide variety of government and family structures and women suffrage activists saw that gaining access to this political power, in whatever system of governance, was crucial to effectively addressing women's concerns in every other public and private sphere. Political power was the key to furthering women's status at a national level and suffrage activists rightly saw that international forces could be mobilised to help win this political power. The international vision of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) saw the establishment of Asian missions promoting women's suffrage in Tokyo, Shanghai, Rangoon, Manila and Bombay.<sup>2</sup> Women's suffrage activists demanded the right to be national citizens in the fullest possible political sense and to achieve this goal they demonstrated their power as active global citizens. This outlook has ensured that the

history of feminism had an international or transnational dimension. Leila Rupp argued that the period between the two world wars could be labelled 'the first wave of an international women's movement.'<sup>3</sup> Her approach, which viewed women's movements as inherently transnational, documented the making of a collective identity of women despite the tensions between nationalism and internationalism. This perspective (though largely Atlantic-centric) concluded that women's transnational movements had an impact on world politics. Feminism and women's movements transcend national boundaries – and therefore a history of feminism or women's movements should not be bound by the geography or imagined community of nation alone.<sup>4</sup> A transnational movement deserves a more truly international perspective.

Despite the frequent wide-ranging conversations between women's suffrage activists around the world, we know very little today about the struggles for equal citizenship rights by women outside of the western world. Carole Pateman observed in 1994 that, 'We know remarkably little about how women won the vote around the world. How important are local circumstances and local political configurations, or struggles for national self-determination? How important are cultural differences, or differences in political regimes?'<sup>5</sup> In a bid to redress the omission noted by Pateman in 1994, Fletcher *et al.* drew together research on suffrage struggles in a more international perspective in their volume *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire*.<sup>6</sup> However, this work privileges colonial agency and leadership on the issue within its Empire-centric theme and includes only India as an Asian case study. Thus, the dominant historical narrative has been one shaped by nations with long and proud democratic histories – usually nations with equally long and ignoble colonial histories. Indeed, the campaigns of the British, European and American suffragists have attracted the overwhelming majority of scholarly attention. One would be forgiven for thinking that women's suffrage organisations only emerged in wealthy and powerful nations. But this is a skewed vision of the past.

In a seminal book on the beginnings of feminism in the 'Third World,' Kumari Jayawardena called attention to the links between feminism and nationalism in the first wave feminist movements that emerged in the context of colonialism. Jayawardena argued that feminism was part of all nationalist movements and was not necessarily an ideology 'imposed' from the west.<sup>7</sup> The book concluded that 'struggles for women's emancipation were an essential and integral part of national resistance movements'<sup>8</sup> and that the issue of suffrage was raised alongside concerns about women's education and the construction of the 'new woman' of the early twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> Our volume builds on Jayawardena's work by problematising this link between feminism and nationalism as it explores the dilemmas raised by women's participation in nationalist movements that mobilised women without enfranchising them.

Women throughout the Asian region mobilised energetically and in

concert with their British, European and American sisters, to win suffrage rights. But, the challenges faced by Asia's suffragists differed markedly from their western counterparts.

For the suffrage activist in Asia . . . the pressing questions included the following: 'Which "government" do we lobby for suffrage?' 'What should be the relationship between nationalist and feminist struggles?' 'What are the borders of our nation and who are the "national women" we represent?' These questions were crucial in the formation of the non-Western suffrage struggles.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, the precepts that gave rise to the notion of women's suffrage were European and not Chinese, Japanese or Indian. Incorporating notions of women's equal political rights with men required a willingness to incorporate western philosophies of the 'natural rights' of all human beings forged in the European Enlightenment. Asia's women's suffrage activists were advocating a fusion of cultural values where American, British, French or New Zealand women argued for the full application of pre-existing cultural principles. Perhaps in the Asian context one must ask the question Tamara Loos proposes in her chapter on Thailand (this volume): 'How can we write a history of women's suffrage and rights in non-Western countries without implicitly regarding it as a site of mimicry for Western forms of political authority?'

Independence struggles and campaigns for control of national assets and borders concentrated the minds of both male and female political activists throughout Asia after decades of colonialist expansion and imperialist aggression. During the years they pressed the case for women's political rights their countries frequently experienced grinding poverty, social chaos and military unrest. The twin fetters of patriarchy and colonialism generated unusual alliances for the women's suffrage activists. Ironically, Asia's women's suffrage activists often aligned themselves with women from the very nations responsible for the economic and social chaos their country was currently experiencing. Similarly, their participation in nationalist struggles for independence promoted strong and productive bonds with men in the anti-colonial movements. Patriarchy was a resilient enemy but, in the face of colonial oppression, men could be powerful allies.

Narratives of 'modern citizenship' forged in the face of threatened or perforated national borders presented Asia's women's suffragists with different challenges and different opportunities to those of western suffragists. Campaigns for national strengthening enabled women to mobilise narratives of 'reform' that destabilised long-entrenched patriarchal practice. National survival, they argued, depended upon reinvigorating the culture along modern, western lines. This argument carried particular force once the global powers of the USA and Britain granted women

suffrage rights in 1920 and 1928 respectively. Two of the strongest nations of the world had granted women equal political rights, so why should not Japan, China or the Philippines? In this argument women's equal participation in the public sphere could be reconstructed as imperative for national benefit while undercutting traditional gender hierarchies. Women's rights activists presented gender equality in citizenship rights as emblematic of modernity and strength. In doing so they attempted to indelibly mark women's suffrage as an antidote to a central anxiety of governance – loss of control to a foreign power or inability to regain control from a foreign power. National independence and stability, they argued, would be best enhanced by the introduction of the key signifier of modernity and strength – women's engagement with public, national politics. Some governments had attempted selective westernisation in an attempt to maintain or construct patriarchal hierarchies to contain women's bid for political power. Japan encouraged the population's enthusiasm for a western-style constitutional monarchy in 1889 but only two years later reasserted Confucian values of female subordination when Japan's feminists invoked John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* to justify their participation in Japan's rush for western-style democracy.<sup>11</sup> As the chapters in this volume reveal, tensions in the public narrative between the tradition-bound 'national woman' and the international 'national woman' produced fraught speaking positions for Asia's suffragists. Furthermore debates about the 'new modern woman' or the 'new woman' raised different issues for Asian women, highlighting the tension between western colonial influences that empowered women, and the society's definition of women as 'bearers of tradition,' and women's own desires to be nationalists (since they were also part of the nationalist movements).

This current volume explores the Asian contribution to this global movement to reconfigure the nature of citizenship and national politics. It shows how the suffrage movements in Asia differed in outlook, opportunities and campaign strategies from those in the USA, Britain or Germany. Moreover, the diverse case studies outlined in the chapters below also reveal that factors contributing to the enhancement or impediment of women's suffrage in Asia differed markedly between countries in the region. The culturally and politically diverse region of Asia has a rich and diverse experience of women's struggle for equal political rights with men. These differences are determined as much by the local cultural expectations of womanhood as they do from their interaction with colonialist or imperialist powers.

At the broadest possible level, the publication of this volume will prevent the perpetuation of misinformation that denies Asian women's political agency. In 1994 Matsukawa and Tachi noted, 'Japanese women did not achieve the vote until 1945, when the country was under direct Allied – mainly American – control. Subsequently, many Americans believe that Japanese women owed their suffrage to the Allied Occupation and that they had gained the vote without an organised struggle.'<sup>12</sup> In fact

Japanese women suffragists had been active for decades and had strong influences on the Chinese women's suffrage campaigns. Japanese women had not waited quietly for 'modernised citizenship,' nor were they acquiescent, ignorant victims of Japanese patriarchy.<sup>13</sup> Such widespread Eurocentric assumptions about the passive 'Asian woman' require painstaking dismantling. As the chapters in this volume demonstrate, Asian women's political agency has a long and significant history.

### **Why have the Asian suffrage movements been ignored?**

There are a number of reasons why women's suffrage struggles in Asia have not attracted scholarly attention in the past. Prime among these has been the absence of geo-political stability in the nations of the region. For example, the fractured or fluid borders of Indonesia and China over the course of the twentieth century have made the narration of a national history difficult to fix. Did Chinese women win suffrage in 1947 when the Republic of China was under the Nationalist Party (GMD) leadership even though this constitution would last only two years on the mainland? Or did Chinese women score their victory in 1949 when the Communist Party (CCP) gained power and maintained stable borders and governance in the establishment of the People's Republic of China? Does the history of women's suffrage in China then become the history of the ROC in Taiwan rather than that of the majority women in the PRC? A similar complex and fractured genealogy could be written for many of the nation-states covered in this volume. Thus, the absence of stable national borders during the times when suffrage was being sought made for a challenging environment for the women activists and it has also made it a challenge for historians of these women's campaigns.

Compounding the problem of unstable borders has been the paucity of democratic governments whose interests the excavation and promotion of the history of women's suffrage can buttress. The governments of the USA, Australia and New Zealand promote popular knowledge of the history of women's suffrage in their respective countries through the erection of statues, the publication of postage stamps, funding of anniversary conferences, the publication of historical books and the like. These events serve to confirm and celebrate the existing form of government and reinforce the legitimacy of the current political system. Historical studies of women's suffrage in these western nations consolidate the political status quo. This ideological tool is not available to many governments in the Asian region – for many years democratic electoral government was a rare phenomenon. President Marcos, Chairman Mao, President Suharto and General Park had little to gain from promoting deeper understandings of their respective nations' democratic roots. Also the history of women's suffrage cannot but expose men's misogyny in the past as the arguments and strategies used to block women's empowerment become part of the



nation's official history. Perhaps the male leadership would not want past chauvinist behaviour encoded in the nation's collective memory.

National histories of political activism have also diminished the confrontational struggle by women to win a place in the political order. Governments in the west often presented themselves as the enlightened benefactors bestowing suffrage on women. Women's antagonistic role in forcing these concessions from the male-dominated government has been marginalised in their 'consolidation-histories.' Patricia Grimshaw and Audrey Oldfield have demonstrated this pattern in the histories of New Zealand and Australia.<sup>14</sup> The same phenomenon has occurred in many nations in Asia. As the studies below reveal, it is commonplace for people within China and Japan to assume that women's suffrage was a uniquely western phenomenon. Orientalist narratives of subordinate and submissive Asian women have been actively promoted by many regimes (e.g. Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia). Governments have tended to suppress or co-opt histories of antagonistic political struggle to prevent or diminish the possibilities of similar confrontations with the political status-quo occurring again.

However, the power of 'democracy' as an emblem of universal human rights in the current Euro-American dominated international rhetoric suggests that suffrage struggles could well be mobilised in new ways by regimes wishing to improve their democratic credentials. One recent trend in historiography within the PRC has been the co-option of women's suffrage struggles from the 1920s by the CCP – the national history written since 1990 records how CCP leadership invigorated the earlier movement. In fact, the CCP depended upon the suffrage movement's networks of politically active women to expand the small CCP membership. This rewriting of history in relation to the women's suffrage movement reflects the current CCP's concerns to find democratic roots during a period of cautious democratisation and internationalisation.<sup>15</sup> The promotion of links between histories of ruling parties and the now 'internationally normalised' principle of gender equity in suffrage rights can enhance legitimacy of rule.

Trends in historical scholarship in both Asia and the west have also inhibited research on women's suffrage. Ellen Carol DuBois noted that even within women's history in the west there has been comparatively scant attention paid to the history of women's suffrage.<sup>16</sup> Erroneously dismissed as an 'institutional reform' and a conservative development rather than a radical challenge to an existing gender hierarchy, the women's suffrage movement has been disregarded as 'elitist' and therefore of limited broad appeal. The limited interest in women's suffrage generally combined with the institutionally marginal status of Asian history in the western academy has ensured that interest in Asian suffrage was almost non-existent. Scholars tended to be more interested in the movements they perceived to be of greater 'moment' – Marxist inspired challenges to

gender roles dominated studies of China's gender hierarchies, the impact of economic growth on women dominated Japanese history and the integration of women into nation-building dominated studies of Indonesia and Korea. Women's suffrage was dismissed erroneously as a minor campaign for political reform.

However, from the mid-1980s scholarship in the area has reclaimed the radical roots of the women's suffrage cause. As Susan Kingsley Kent has described, the women's suffrage movement around the world 'set out to redefine and recreate, by political means, the sexual culture' of their nations.<sup>17</sup> They perceived of themselves as participants in radical social and political change and their experience of men's resistance to their bid for equality in power stood as a constant reminder of this point. Nonetheless, Richard Evans' study shows that one of the most persuasive arguments promoting women's suffrage was the belief that women's suffrage was 'a means of controlling society in the interests of the "stable" part of the population, the middle classes.'<sup>18</sup> Rather than standing as evidence of their conservatism, this argument could also be seen as astute political lobbying through the appeal to the power-holders' vested interests. In fact, over the course of the twentieth century women's equal suffrage with men would have dramatic long-term impacts on family life, employment patterns and sexual customs. It was evolutionary in impact but revolutionary in philosophy.

Gender unity was fundamental to the women's suffrage cause and yet class divisions had the potential, sometimes realised, to fracture this solidarity. In Britain the schism between universal suffragists (all men and women) and equality suffragists (men and women of equal social and financial standing) reinforced to some scholars the view that many women activists were part of a middle- and upper-classes push to consolidate their control of the nation. Yet class interests were not uniformly invoked around the suffrage movements of the world. These class-based splits were not mobilised by either the pro- or anti-suffrage groups in frontier nations like Australia and New Zealand. In these nations class differences were undercut in part by the egalitarian rhetoric underpinning the pioneering foundations of these nations but also often by the position of the white colonial group as racial minorities. In the Asian region, the direct and immediate threat of foreign domination provided class-unity for extended periods during suffrage struggles. The absence of an identifiable foreign enemy in the home colonising nations possibly allowed more scope for class divisions.

As the chapters in this volume reveal, the national leadership and most of the participants in the Asian suffrage campaigns, for the most part, were educated and privileged women. But, so were most of the men active in politics – nationalist, communist or anarchist – during the same period. Their elite status should not diminish the revolutionary nature of their claims. The very nature of a struggle conceived along the lines of gender

makes the ramifications of any gains of vital importance to a wide range of class interests. Moreover, gender unity sometimes bridged political divisions in the fluid political matrices of the region. As is evident in the chapter on China, women from a range of political persuasions joined forces to win recognition for women's equal political rights with men. Communist and Nationalist women were simultaneously members of China's suffrage movement and co-operated on numerous initiatives to further this goal through the war-time parliament. By dismissing the history of women's suffrage as the history of 'conservative' women, scholars have missed the opportunity to explore important connections in the gendered configuration of class, nation and governance. In this regard, the chapters below show the importance of examining the intricacies of class interests in relation to gender interests while being mindful of their connections to the project of building national and ethnic identities. As Mire Kiokare wrote, 'Gender was always articulated in relation to other categories of power, such as class, race, sexuality and nationality.'<sup>19</sup>

### **Theoretical challenges presented by Asian women's suffrage struggles**

There are numerous reasons for promoting awareness of the particularities of histories of Asian women's suffrage struggles. Not least of these is that as approximately half the region's population, women's conceptions of their role in both formal and informal politics is crucial to an understanding of the political structures as a whole. Clearly, an enhanced perception of women's suffrage will enrich our knowledge of the political scenes in nations within this important and rapidly developing region. However, there are also theoretical innovations implicit in this project. Asian case studies of women's suffrage challenge our understandings of the conventions that have underpinned much of our scholarship on women's suffrage to date.

Scholarship on women's suffrage has for the most part developed methods and conventions that function well in the writing of history in the west. They have particularly focussed on the identification of a year of victory – reflecting the need for commemorative anniversaries to celebrate the strength and power of their democracies. As noted above, many of the nations in the Asian region had more complex and geographically fraught borders that disrupt this desire for a single year marking the split between suffrage and non-suffrage. In many of the nations of the Asian region, the identification of a single year of victory is less indicative of the process of winning suffrage. For example, nationalist independence struggles and the end of World War II are external markers establishing new geopolitical structures under which women's suffrage could be realised. The date of passage of the Japanese constitution that granted women equal political rights with men does not reflect the ebb and flow of the women's

suffrage struggle. The clearer markers of the strength and power of this movement could be placed earlier – during the interwar period with the activities of the New Woman Association formed in 1919.<sup>20</sup> Where the 1893 victory for women's suffrage in New Zealand marks the culmination in New Zealand suffragists' campaigns, the 1945 victory for Japanese women should not be read in the same light.

The absence of a democratic government in nations like the PRC, ROC, Vietnam and Korea at various times during the twentieth century, within this scholarly preoccupation with a 'year of victory' could suggest that women's suffrage was a failure and therefore not worthy of discussion. 'Success,' as measured by the existence of a democratic government where women can freely vote in elections, is not a useful marker of the presence or absence of historical value within the Asian region. For example, China's women's suffrage movement was remarkably successful and inventive during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. The movement evolved in the belief that democratic elected governments would emerge from the chaos of the decades. Their achievements should not be diminished by the emergence of dictatorial regimes in both the ROC on Taiwan and the PRC. At the same time, in Indonesia (Blackburn, this volume), although women had won the vote, the presence of dictatorial regimes (from 1955–99) raises the crucial question: what was the use of having the vote if elections were meaningless?

Thus, studying women's suffrage movements in Asian contexts make the 'year of victory' perspective problematic. In Korea there was no such thing as a 'year of victory' (Wells, this volume) and in Thailand suffrage was not a watershed for women's history (Loos, this volume). Several chapters in this volume could make a claim that women's education was a more important marker for 'success' than achieving the vote per se. Education gave women access to knowledge (and because of colonial influences, western knowledge), and the qualifications that allowed them to break out of the domestic sphere. Since it was the key that would make women equal to men in the knowledge game, education often framed the debates about women's capacity to vote. In China, the domination of Confucianism in Chinese politics excluded women from the meritocracy and official political power. Louise Edwards observed: 'in a cultural context that equates education with the right to exercise political power, the Chinese women's suffrage campaigns' focus on education was of paramount importance' (Edwards, this volume). The leaders of the Chinese suffrage movement were all highly educated women who accepted that education was the criterion for political power. So much value was placed on education that the link between education and class status was not problematised or even raised and debated in China (Edwards, this volume). In the Philippines, education was also used as leverage in the argument for suffrage. American colonial policy gave women education on equal par with men. From 1908 onwards women were allowed into universities and into the professions.

The few Filipino men who argued for women's suffrage made the point that once women were given university education and were able to enter the professions they cannot be denied the right to vote (Roces, this volume). But, despite the diversity in the spectrum of Asian experiences education was seen as *the* marker for women's status perhaps even more than suffrage. In Vietnam, the women's rights movements also emphasised the need to educate women. Korean and Japanese leading suffragists were, like their Chinese counterparts, highly educated women. In 1920 Korea, a lecture sponsored by the Association of Women's Education proclaimed: 'You need education to achieve human status beyond your current slave status.'<sup>21</sup> In India the demand for women's education and the vote coalesced (Pearson, this volume).

And what about the countries that cannot boast of a women's suffrage movement? Does this mean that women were not politicised? How does one attempt to write the histories of women's suffrage in Thailand, Vietnam or Korea where no bona fide women's suffrage associations were organised? These examples reveal the inapplicability of western models of suffrage histories, compelling us to redefine first wave feminist movements in Asia. Our authors Tamara Loos, Micheline Lessard and Ken Wells have each dealt with these challenges.

Studies of women's suffrage in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the USA have recently been invigorated by the challenges posed by considering the impact racialising narratives have on women's suffrage success. Narratives of race were frequently mobilised by women suffragists to further their cause. Indeed, women's suffrage activists of Anglo-European ethnic background in nations such as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States could position themselves as part of the 'governing class' by distinguishing themselves against the indigenous 'unruly' peoples of each nation. The slave trade to the USA created an additional functionality to racialising narratives in that country. Philip Cohen has also demonstrated that from 1848 to 1918,

a core within the [USA] suffrage leadership practised a nationalism based on exclusive citizenship that was conditioned on whiteness. . . . This nationalism was realised through an alliance between white American women and men that subordinated gender conflict – even as suffrage leaders sought to improve their position as women. In the process, these leaders advanced the cause of women's suffrage while furthering the exclusion and oppression of non-white women and men.<sup>22</sup>

These and other studies<sup>23</sup> have challenged the early, simple theories of women's suffrage that posited antagonistic struggle along a gender axis mediated only by class. They have demonstrated the potency of racialising narratives to gender equality.

Narratives of race were activated in Asian suffrage movements but primarily as a tool for furthering nationalism, independence and liberation from the European or American domination of all classes and multiple ethno-linguistic groups. The very presence of the colonial regimes or imperialist military threats created a readily identifiable enemy against which a diversity of race interests could be unified – at least in the initial stages of the suffrage movement. As the chapters in this volume reveal, in Asia ethnicity, class and gender intersect in ways that challenge current theories of the utility of racialising narratives for the women's suffrage cause. In most parts of the region, nationalism, the desire to imagine the boundaries of the nation, constrained women's suffrage activists in the invocation of race as a unifying, mobilising narrative. In this regard a study of women's suffrage in Asia presents new insights into the connections between ethnicity and nationalism as tools in a gender struggle. The final chapter in this volume by Patricia Grimshaw presents case studies of how racialising narratives were used in the suffrage debates in New Zealand and Australia. In these countries, whether white women or indigenous women were given the vote, depended precisely on colonial narratives of race.

The diversity of the Asian experience of struggles for suffrage is also highlighted when narratives of race are explored. In China (Edwards, this volume) women's suffrage activists of the 1900–11 period mobilised racial distinctions between the Han and the Manchu to promote their case for gender equality in the Han republic which they predicted would emerge from the collapsing Qing dynasty. However, this racist rhetoric turned on the women when in 1912 the new Republic of China reaffirmed the entrenched patriarchal nature of Han chauvinism. In Japan during the 1930s as part of the rise of nationalistic, anti-American and anti-European sentiment, racial differences were invoked to stymie the passage of women's suffrage bills. 'It would be unseemly and immoral for Japanese women to imitate western women' and women's suffrage was 'against the customs of Japan.'<sup>24</sup> In the Philippines those who were anti-suffrage accused Filipino women of mimicking American ways. Filipino suffragists responded by using a feminist reading of the pre-colonial past where women were priestesses enjoying relatively equal status with men, to argue that their demands for the vote and the reform of the Spanish Civil Code were merely campaigns demanding the restoration of rights lost to colonialism. In this sense, suffrage was not an attempt to become 'western' or to adopt American ways, it was a step needed to reclaim rights lost to western colonial rule. Racialising narratives were also plugged into nationalist movements raising different issues and dilemmas for women suffragists.

In addition to bringing new light to the theoretical discussion about ethnicity and suffrage, the Asian case studies can provide new insights into the role religion plays in the campaign for suffrage internationally. For the most part, Protestantism and women's suffrage have been accepted as

inextricably linked. Tyrrell has discussed the manner in which the WCTU 'linked the religious and the secular through the concerted and far-reaching reform strategies based on applied Christianity.'<sup>25</sup> How would a movement speaking so clearly from within the tradition of Protestant evangelism connect with the women of Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic and Confucian Asia? The chapters below reveal the diversity of Asian responses and the binding power of nationalism to the 'indigenisation' of the women's suffrage cause within a multi-religious Asia. Christianity (specifically Protestantism) was by no means a prerequisite for women's suffrage to be included on the national agenda and neither was it vital to the success of the various national campaigns. Korea's case is an exception since conversion to Christianity gave women a higher status (traditionally women were the shamans and shamanism was associated with 'superstition' and low status for women). Conversion to Christianity allowed the early Korean suffragist leaders to keep the ties between women and religion un-severed and at the same time acquire a modern western education. This resulted in an increase in women's status as the link between women and superstition was destroyed (Wells, this volume). In China, the suffrage movement was not particularly linked with Christianity although some activists were WCTU members. Confucianism established a model of public activism and national service that was not religious in inspiration. In her insightful chapter on the history of suffrage in Indonesia Susan Blackburn clearly reveals that Islam had a low profile: 'the foregoing history of Indonesian women's struggle for suffrage makes clear the relatively subdued role that religion, and specifically Islam, has played' (Blackburn, this volume).

Finally, we want to problematise the links between feminism and nationalism unpacked by histories of the suffrage movement. While Jayawardena's pioneering book called attention to the imbrication of nationalist movements and women's movements, the essays in this volume focus on the dilemmas, complexities and problems this connection has wrought for women's campaigns. Asian women have had to support nationalist movements that disenfranchised them. As Roces posits in her chapter on the Philippines,

While Filipino men campaigned for the independence of the Philippines from colonial rule and demanded the right to negotiate its future; women's roles in that emerging nation were still contested. It was Filipino women's assumptions and desires that they be an important part of nation-building and Filipino men's reluctance to share that space equally, which raised dilemmas for the suffragists.

(Roces, this volume)

In each of these respects, this volume challenges the epistemology of histories on women's suffrage. In presenting the diverse case studies from the Asian region the theoretical impetus shifts towards nationalism,

national-identity and national strengthening. Assumptions about class, religion and ethnic responses to the campaign must be reconfigured to incorporate the culturally diverse nation-states of twentieth-century Asia.

### **Women and citizenship: citizenship is a gendered project**

Axiomatic to the theoretical foundation of this project is the examination of notions of citizenship that account correctly for gender while simultaneously addressing cultural and economic influences on changing narratives of citizenship. As other scholars have noted, citizenship is not a gender-neutral narrative.<sup>26</sup> Expectations of the roles men and women should play in their service to the nation differ for each gender and these expectations have altered over time. For example, with the success of the women's suffrage movement over the twentieth century most nation-states have rejected the idea that woman's private role would be undermined by her public citizenship. It is now commonly accepted that woman's role in the private sphere is irrelevant to her public participation. Similarly, woman's special position as a citizen with voting rights but no obligations to participate in the military defence of the nation is regarded as unproblematic in most countries around the world. Citizenship is flexible, open-ended and contested – gender divisions present the major fault lines in this ongoing debate.

In recognition that citizenship has not been gender neutral, scholars like Lister demonstrate that there is a tension between demands for 'inclusion on the same terms as men' and alternatively to 'press the case for the recasting of citizenship's premises so as to accommodate women's particular interests.'<sup>27</sup> She argues for the latter declaring that a pluralistic citizenship is required. However, it is important to note as Blackburn has done in her work on gendered citizenship in Indonesia, that most theories of citizenship are centred upon experiences of western nations.<sup>28</sup> The pluralism of citizenship must incorporate the experiences and lived-reality of non-western women in non-liberal democratic governments. The chapters to follow explore a diverse range of narratives of citizenship in the Asian region. These concepts have emerged and evolved oftentimes within unstable nation-states with a host of different regimes of governance. In this light, the volume explores the manner in which notions of gendered citizenship were mobilised as tools of governance and also as weapons of activism or resistance by women. Barbara Molony's chapter (this volume) confronts this issue when she argues that suffragism in Japan during the interwar years was 'the embodiment of feminists' quest for full citizenship in the Japanese nation.' And yet feminist strategies distinguished between advocacy under the condition of subjecthood and advocacy of citizenship rights.

Semi-democratic or dictatorial regimes have been active in reconstituting the iconography of national woman's citizenship in order to reclaim



modernity within culturally specific patriarchal structures. For example, the conjugal dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos in the Philippines established a clear link between women, marital status and informal political power. The Philippines' women's suffrage movement sought unmediated political power for women and by the 1970s female power was constructed at the apex as being conjugal in origin.<sup>29</sup> Family ties created and shaped the notion of a politically active female citizen in the Philippines. Similarly, Robinson has demonstrated that New Order politics in Indonesia created a female citizen that was family oriented and subordinated to men. 'Formally, women's citizenship is defined in terms of their difference from men, within the notion of *kodrat* (biologically determined difference) and their primary civic duties are performed in their roles as wives and mothers.'<sup>30</sup> The patriarchal family became the symbolic base of the nation and Suharto became the symbolic father of the nation-family. Women's democratic activism was framed within this collective and ultimately male-centred narrative. As the case studies reveal, citizenship is gendered in myriad different ways. Moreover, women's exercise of power is presented and explained in myriad different narratives as well. Patriarchal hegemony tries at once to contain women's political power (through rhetoric of nation-family) while also harnessing their energies (within structures that reinforce the current political system). The chapters in this volume explore the negotiation of the boundaries of citizenship during the decades of suffrage struggle in the region. In their active public campaigning for suffrage rights, the women activists stretched the limits of women's citizenship beyond the private family bounds.

### **Defining the 'modern Asian woman'**

Because women's suffrage arose out of the western democratic template it was perceived to be western in origin. It was also western colonial powers that wanted to modernise Asian women as part of the bid to modernise and exploit the colonies. To do this, colonisers imposed their cultural constructions of the feminine into Asian soil. Colonial education was one way this was imparted but colonial policies on women clearly articulated the new 'modern' woman.

Asian women's demands for the vote raised questions about which definition of the 'modern' woman or the 'modern' Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Filipino) woman would be endorsed officially. Inevitably the educated women (mostly western-educated women) were seen as western-influenced. Since first wave feminism in Asia was linked to their respective nationalist movements these posed distinct dilemmas for the suffragists. Feminists who wished to enter the political space had to contend with criticisms that they were 'modern' but no longer 'Asian.' Many had to present their arguments for suffrage in the current narrative of nationalism.

In the chapter on the Philippines (this volume) Rocés argues that the

suffrage debate was a debate about which cultural construction of the feminine should be endorsed in the early twentieth century. Since the Philippines experienced two colonial powers (Spain and America) the suffrage debates were about which colonial construct of the 'Filipino woman' – the Spanish influenced Maria Clara who was mired in the domestic sphere, or the Americanised English speaking, university educated, professional, suffragist – should be endorsed in the early twentieth century. Men who were against women's suffrage expressed nostalgia for Maria Clara while those who were pro-suffrage acknowledged the appearance of the new educated woman that took her place.

In Korea, the western-educated women who were products of western missionary education were called 'the new women' and the women's movement in 1920s Korea was dubbed 'the new women's movement' (Wells, this volume). Insook Kwon writes that the category 'new Women in Korea' was meant 'to distinguish early twentieth-century educated intellectual women in Korea from the more traditional Korean women';<sup>31</sup> these were women who were no longer associated with 'superstition,' the trait that held them back from gender equality (Wells, this volume). Japanese women also wore the label 'new woman' proudly and The New Woman Association founded in 1919 'embraced both types of feminism: the demand for protection of women as subjects of the family state and the demand for the civil rights of inclusion' (Molony, this volume). 'New woman' was usually conflated with 'suffragist' in the Asian context.

Clearly, the suffragists were seen as 'intellectuals,' as highly educated women, and it was education that transformed them from 'old' to 'new.' But since education had its roots in western intellectual traditions (though not merely western since Korean women were influenced by Japan as well) their presence problematised woman as 'bearer of tradition' and this unsettled many Asian men. The Korean women who identified themselves as 'new' rejected the doctrines of Korean Confucian patriarchy and acknowledged the influence of the west: 'Women who identified with this movement advocated free love (love between men and women regardless of marriage), free marriage (marriage without the intervention of parents) and the destruction of the dominant feminine chastity ideology.'<sup>32</sup> Such conscious alliance with western cultural constructions of the feminine may have been the reason why 'Ultimately, the most visible of these New Women became outcasts and died in miserable conditions.'<sup>33</sup>

Whether women were 'old' or 'new,' such labels were still representations of women that were only beginning to be problematised in the 1920s. Micheline Lessard's excellent chapter on the women's movement in Vietnam highlights the complex interplay between two seemingly contradictory representations of Vietnamese women: the woman as patriot and military hero (epitomised by the Trung Sisters who led the uprising against centuries of Chinese rule), and the subservient woman who dutifully conformed to Confucianism's Three Obediences (see Lessard, this

volume). This fighter/mother image was never problematised in official representations of women to this day despite Vietnam's record for fighting imperialism.

### **Dressing suffrage**

Since the debates on suffrage also raised debates about the 'new woman'; one possible way to literally distinguish the 'new' woman from the 'old' woman was through dress. Suffragists manipulated dress and appearances as part of their overall strategies for political empowerment. Although in recent years there has been a growing number of studies on the politics of dress, scholarship on western suffrage movements have not yet explored the links between the semiotics of dress and suffrage campaigns. The notable exception is Wendy Parkins' work on British suffragettes. Parkins has explored how British suffragettes used colourful hats and dress to avoid arrest.<sup>34</sup> Fashionable dress was part and parcel of the identity and performance of the 'suffragette' who took pains to dissociate herself from those anti-suffragists who chose to represent her as 'unfeminine' or 'manly,' and as a deliberate attack against the middle-class belief that the female subject was 'decorative but apolitical.'<sup>35</sup> Fashion, according to Parkins was a form of agency because it 'enabled and abetted their protest.'<sup>36</sup> When suffragists were arrested for a window-smashing raid in 1912, the 49 detained refused to give their names compelling the constable to offer a detailed description of the offenders through their attire. Once in the police station, the 49 women exchanged clothes and hats preventing the constable from identifying them properly. In the end the women escaped punishment.<sup>37</sup>

The politics of dress is quite significant in the Asian context since the suffrage movements appeared at the same time as nationalist movements when 'national' dress began to be invented and contested. When nations came to be imagined in Asia, the invention of national dress was part of the essential accoutrements of 'invented tradition,' particularly in the nationalist movements of the first three decades of the twentieth century. In India, Emma Tarlo documented Mahatma Gandhi's many experiments with Indian dress in the quest for the fashion apparel that would most represent the 'Indian' by obscuring caste and regional differences. In order to do this an entire new form of dress had to be fashioned.<sup>38</sup> In Indonesia, Sukarno appropriated the black Pici cap as a symbol of Indonesian nationalism against the Dutch.<sup>39</sup> The Vietnamese *aó dài* and the Chinese *qipao* emerged in the periods of intensified nationalism (the *aó dài* being invented and first worn in 1930 and the *qipao* becoming associated later with Hong Kong identity)<sup>40</sup> and the *sampot* evolved into the costume that distinguished 'real' Khmers from the Vietnamese in colonial Cambodia.<sup>41</sup>

But dress also raised dilemmas for the suffragists who wanted political power (at that time represented by men with western suits who were

enfranchised), and the desire to be nationalists – endorsing woman as bearer of tradition.<sup>42</sup> At a time when the nation was just being imagined in Asia, men could wear western suits and still be nationalists (because in western dress they saw themselves as equal to the western powers),<sup>43</sup> women wearing western dress would be seen pejoratively as mimicking western ways and as renouncing their role as ‘bearers’ of tradition.

Thus for Asian women suffragists the problem of what to wear was more critical than it was for male nationalists. Korean ‘new women’ ‘became pioneers in the redesign of women’s costumes.’<sup>44</sup> They claimed that traditional feminine dress could cause health problems because women’s formal attire and convention required that the breasts be tightened with bands so that body parts were not sexualised. The ‘new women’ redesigned the Korean traditional dress and made it less restrictive. They also were responsible for introducing western-style dresses and short haircuts. This strategy, however, yielded contradictory results. On the positive side, these women were seen as the purveyors of fashion, on the other, these new fashions were read as signs of depravity and the women suffered social disapproval.<sup>45</sup> In China, Qiu Jin connected ‘women’s bound feet, elaborate cosmetics and accoutrements with women’s dependency on men’ (Edwards, this volume). Footbinding in late Qing China symbolised ‘decay, degeneracy, and bondage.’<sup>46</sup> In the 1910s and 1920s western-style high heels (pumps not stilettos) became popular and were worn with the *qipao*.<sup>47</sup> Dorothy Ko argued that both *qipao* and heels were hybrid styles: ‘Seen against the backdrop of the birth of the modern girl as an expression of semi-colonial Chinese agency, . . . the popularity of the *qipao* and high heels was the product of a new cultural politics centred in Shanghai.’<sup>48</sup> The educated Vietnamese women from the 1920s gave up traditional customs including traditional clothing. The Vietnamese modern women no longer lacquered their teeth; they cut their hair short and wore western fashions (Lessard, this volume). On the other hand, British women allies’ choice of Indian dress did not please the British Administration when in December 1917 a deputation of women went to the Secretary of State to present their commitment to enhancing female education. British women wore Indian dress because they saw themselves as Indian women and they were dressing for an Indian audience that welcomed this choice of clothing. But British administrators regarded British women in Indian dress as unreliable because they had ‘gone native’ and ‘were therefore an embarrassment to the world of colonial officialdom’ (Pearson, this volume). That native men could wear western dress but western women could not wear native dress, perhaps underlines the common gendered codes of both the east and the west where women had to be bearers (and wearers) of national tradition. Thus, western women who wore Indian dress were interpreted as having abandoned their roles as bearers of western tradition in the colonies. Meanwhile, Gail Pearson’s fascinating chapter on

India in this volume revealed how *purdah* was raised in the debates on women's suffrage (Pearson, this volume).

In the Philippines, Roces argues, suffragists were aware of the semiotics of dress. Although the Filipino suffragists campaigned for the use of western dress as uniforms in schools and universities and as more practical attire for the workplace, they themselves always wore Filipino national dress in the form of a *terno* and a *pañuelo*. While Korean 'new women' invoked health benefits as a reason for abandoning traditional forms of dress, Filipino suffragists claimed that Filipino native dress was impractical for the weather and may even be dangerous as school attire. For example, the voluminous sleeves could catch fire from Bunsen burners in chemistry laboratories. This strategy proved to be successful. For although these women proposed quite radical changes to both the civil and electoral laws, they did not overtly challenge cultural constructions of the woman as 'wife and mother,' as moral guardian and civic worker and as the beauty queen who reigned in the home. They were also nationalists who wanted to preserve the woman as bearer of tradition. By literally dressing women's radical agendas in the traditional gender narrative women succeeded in lobbying for changes in women's status. As Roces puts it, 'lobbying for women's equality seemed less "modern" if the lobbyist was dressed in a *terno* and a *pañuelo*. In actual fact, the Filipino woman had come a long way' (Roces this volume).

Looking back from the twenty-first century, it is tempting to measure the 'success' of women's suffrage by the number of women in formal political power. While in the early twentieth century nations used the yardstick of woman suffrage as a signifier of 'modernity,' today's measure of the post-modern condition is the number of women in parliament or the number of women politicians. For many years, women in the PRC represented about 20 per cent of national legislators but this occurred in a system of 'appointment' and protective quotas rather than election and may not reflect the general willingness of the Chinese population to have female leaders. Moreover, these comparatively high rates of representation have been under threat since the mid-1980s as China increasingly democratises.<sup>49</sup> Democratic elections present far fewer women parliamentarians. India achieves only 9 per cent, Japan 3 per cent, the Philippines 11 per cent, Indonesia 10 per cent, Thailand 6 per cent and South Korea 3 per cent. The non-electoral political systems have far higher rates of female participation. Vietnam stands alongside North Korea and the PRC in having 19 per cent and 20 per cent respectively. Democracy – despite its emblematic significance as a key to suffrage success – has not been as effective as 'socialism' in ensuring the emergence of women in formal politics. Symbolic connections between male gender and political power are deeply entrenched and militate against political electoral success for all but the most outstanding women. But a woman in power even as

president (see Blackburn, this volume) does not necessarily mean that the regime gives more attention to women's issues. The fact that women can vote does not necessarily mean there is a women's vote. As the above statistics show, women do not vote for women because they are women. Must the 'success' of the women's suffrage movement be measured by the numbers of women elected, or by the number of women who vote at all? More women in political office does not necessarily guarantee that women's issues would be raised or prioritised by government.

In highlighting the unique features of women's suffrage movements this book points to new areas of inquiry for future research and hopes to stimulate debates about such 'uniqueness.' There are some countries that we have not been able to include: Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia and Laos for example. Further research could also be done on the local suffrage movements within the various countries. In the Philippines there was a lively suffrage movement in the province of Cebu where women writers published articles in their local newspapers written in their local language. Since we focus on the democratic exercise of power, this volume does not explore informal power and kinship politics – important in the analysis of power in Asia. But by exploring what is problematic about the suffrage movements in Asia, this book takes a step towards unsettling women's history from the 'national' histories of Asia.

## Notes

- 1 Rheta Childe Dorr, 'April 26th Hearing before the Senate Suffrage Committee,' *The Suffragist*, vol. 5, 66, 1917, 9.
- 2 Ian Tyrrell, *Woman's World, Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective 1880–1930*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991, pp. 292–3.
- 3 Leila Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 3.
- 4 Rupp, *ibid.*; Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon and Minoo Moallem (eds), *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999.
- 5 Carole Pateman, 'Three Questions about Womanhood Suffrage,' in Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (eds), *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1994, p. 346.
- 6 Ian Christopher Fletcher, Laura E. Nym Mayhall and Philippa Levine (eds), *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation and Race*, London: Routledge, 2000.
- 7 Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, London: Zed Books, 1985, p. 2.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- 9 *Ibid.*, Chapter 1.
- 10 Louise Edwards, 'Women's Suffrage in China: Challenging Scholarly Conventions,' *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 69, 4, 2000, 618.
- 11 Yukiko Matsukawa and Kaoru Tachi, 'Women's Suffrage and Gender Politics in Japan,' in Daley and Nolan, *op. cit.*, pp. 172–3.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 171.

- 13 Mire Koikare, 'Rethinking Gender and Power in the US Occupation of Japan, 1945–1952,' *Gender and History*, vol. 11, 2, 1999, 313–14.
- 14 Patricia Grimshaw, *Women's Suffrage in New Zealand*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1987; Audry Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia: A Gift or a Struggle?* Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- 15 Louise Edwards, 'Coopting the Chinese Women's Suffrage Movement for the Fifth Modernization – Democracy,' *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 26, 3, 2002, 285–308.
- 16 Ellen Carol DuBois, 'Woman Suffrage Around the World: Three Phases of Suffragist Internationalism,' in Daley and Nolan, op. cit., p. 252.
- 17 S. Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain 1860–1914*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 3.
- 18 Richard J. Evans, *The Feminists*, London: Croom Helm, 1977, p. 217.
- 19 Koikare, op. cit., p. 315.
- 20 Barbara Molony, 'Women's Rights, Feminism and Suffragism in Japan, 1870–1925,' *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 69, 2000, 645.
- 21 Insook Kwon, '“The New Women's Movement” in 1920s Korea: Rethinking the Relationship Between Imperialism and Women,' in Mrinalini Sinha, Donna Guy and Angela Woollacott (eds), *Feminisms and Internationalism*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1999, p. 42.
- 22 Philip N. Cohen, 'Nationalism and Suffrage: Gender Struggle in Nation-Building America,' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 21, 3, 1996, 707.
- 23 Patricia Grimshaw, 'A White Woman's Suffrage,' in Helen Irving (ed.), *A Woman's Constitution? Gender and History in the Australian Commonwealth*, Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1996; Patricia Grimshaw, 'Gender, Citizenship and Race in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Australia, 1890 to the 1930s,' *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 13, 28, 1998, 199–214; Marilyn Lake, 'Between Old Worlds and New: Feminist Citizenship, Nation and Race, the Destabilisation of Identity,' in Daley and Nolan, op. cit., pp. 277–95; Louise Edwards, 'Narratives of Race and Nation in China: Women's Suffrage in the Early Twentieth Century,' *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 25, 6, 2002, 619–30.
- 24 Matsukawa and Tachi, op. cit., p. 180.
- 25 Tyrrell, op. cit., p. 2.
- 26 See for example, R. Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives*, New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- 27 Ibid., p. 91.
- 28 S. Blackburn, 'Winning the Vote for Women in Indonesia,' *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, 29, 1999, 207–18.
- 29 Mina Rocés, *Women, Power and Kinship Politics: Female Power in Post-War Philippines*, Westport: Praeger, 1998.
- 30 Kathryn Robinson, 'Indonesian Women: From Orde Baru to Reformasi,' in Louise Edwards and Mina Rocés (eds), *Women in Asia: Tradition, Modernity and Globalisation*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000, p. 141.
- 31 Kwon, op. cit., p. 38.
- 32 Ibid., pp. 38–9.
- 33 Ibid., p. 39.
- 34 Wendy Parkins, '“The Epidemic of Purple, White and Green”: Fashion and the Suffragette Movement in Britain 1908–14,' in W. Parkins (ed.), *Fashioning the Body Politic*, London: Berg, 2002, pp. 97–124.
- 35 Ibid., pp. 102–10.
- 36 Ibid., p. 107.
- 37 Ibid., p. 117.

- 38 Emma Tarlo, *Clothing Matters: Dress and Identity in India*, London: Hurst, 1996, Chapter 3.
- 39 C. Adams, *Sukarno: An Autobiography As Told to Cindy Adams*, Second Edition, Djakarta: Gunung Agung, 1966, p. 51.
- 40 On Vietnam see Shawn McHale, 'Printing and Power: Vietnamese Debates over Women's Place in History, 1918–1934,' in K.W. Taylor and John K. Whitmore (eds), *Essays into Vietnamese Pasts*, Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1995, p. 189; for China see Hazel Clark, 'The Cheung Sam: Issues of Fashion and Cultural Identity,' in Valerie Steele and John Major (eds), *China Chic East Meets West*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, pp. 155–66; see also Valerie Steele and John Major, Part 1 of the same volume, especially pp. 37–54; Antonia Finnane, 'What Should Chinese Women Wear? A National Problem,' in Antonia Finnane and Anne McLaren (eds), *Dress, Sex and Text in Chinese Culture*, Melbourne: Monash Asia Institute, 1998, pp. 3–36.
- 41 Penny Edwards, 'Restyling Colonial Cambodia (1860–1954): French Dressing, Indigenous Custom and National Costume,' *Fashion Theory*, vol. 5, 4, 2001, 389–416.
- 42 Jean Gelman Taylor uses the official photograph of the Indonesian independence day to argue that while men attired in western suits represented Indonesia's political power, women in traditional dress were fixed to Indonesia's past. See Jean Gelman Taylor, 'Official Photography, Costume and the Indonesian Revolution,' in Jean Gelman Taylor (ed.), *Women Creating Indonesia*, Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1997, pp. 91–126.
- 43 For a close study of how the Thai monarchy represented themselves in western attire see Maurizio Peleggi, *Lords of Things: The Fashioning of the Siamese Monarchy's Modern Image*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002.
- 44 Kwon, op. cit., p. 50.
- 45 Ibid., pp. 50–51.
- 46 Dorothy Ko, 'Jazzing into Modernity: High Heels, Platforms, and Lotus Shoes,' in Steele & Major (eds), *China Chic East meets West*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, p. 146.
- 47 Ibid., p. 145.
- 48 Ibid., p. 148. Later, however, high heels become seen as a form of footbinding.
- 49 Louise Edwards, 'Constraining Women's Political Work with "Women's-Work": The Chinese Communist Party and Women's Political Participation,' in Anne McLaren (ed.), *Chinese Women: Working and Living*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, pp. 109–30.

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## 2 Is the suffragist an American colonial construct?

### Defining 'the Filipino woman' in colonial Philippines<sup>1</sup>

*Mina Roces*

The opponents of woman suffrage predicate their opposition on the assumption that our women of today are the Maria Claras of yesterday. That is a false premise, that is a false assumption. The Maria Claras or the Maria Clara type is gone. I would be ashamed, Mr. President, of our women today if they were still the Maria Claras of yesterday – women who lived in seclusion, frail and fragile, taken care of. It is an insult to progress and civilization if we claim that our women today are of a bygone era.<sup>2</sup>

Discurso del Sr. Joven, delegate to the Constitutional Convention, 1934.

Sr. Joven was pro-suffrage

If we want to preserve the ideal type of the woman of yesteryear, that legendary Maria Clara, pale and modest and frail, so favoured by our romantic poets, the first thing we should do would be to close down the schools, because this way our government and ourselves would save a fortune; in this manner we will produce that humble and ignorant type [of woman] who knew a bit about the art of cooking, cleaning and housekeeping and a little about religion, but was completely ignorant of the business of living; a prospective victim for any rascal snooping at the crossroads.

But even if we regret it, times have changed, and the ideal modern woman is the educated and learned woman, highly responsible, and to this type of woman we cannot deny the privilege of the vote.<sup>3</sup>

Discurso del Delegado Lim, delegate to the Constitutional Convention, 1934. Lim was pro-suffrage. (My translation from Spanish)

A writer in 'El Debate,' in an article intended to show the disadvantages of granting suffrage to the Filipino women, lamented the disappearance of the Filipino maiden who 'like Maria Clara of Rizal's novel, knelt and prayed before an image of the Holy Virgin to ask for enough strength to support her during her interview with her lover, whose steps she heard outside.'

Nothing more ridiculous than this could have been invented. The comparison is not only silly, but it reveals a very poor and erroneous ideal of the Filipino woman as she is, as she has been, and as she ought to be. . . . There is no denying that Maria Clara was a sweet demure thing, full of love, virtue, sacrifice, and abnegation. But that was all she had. . . . The true

type of Filipino woman, as our history reveals to us, was one who was full of self-sacrifice, devotion, and loyalty. But at the same time, she had common sense and had a head to rule her heart, was brave enough to go out with her men folk and stay by their side till the last ditch. She did not mope at home, burning candles before her favourite saint while her home, her children and her country were in peril.

That was the type of Filipino woman we had and have today. And we are proud of her!

Woe be to our country, if its women during its hour of greatest need, should stay at home and burn candles instead of volunteering as nurses, cooks, and helpers to assist their men! Altho (*sic*) it is true that 'more has been wrought by prayers than by anything else,' yet it is equally true that prayers alone cannot set a country free, nor tears and lamentations resuscitate the dead. The last World War has taught us the grim lesson that prayers must be accompanied by a lot of material service.

We repeat: That the white-muslin type of girl like Maria Clara exists only in books.<sup>4</sup>

Trinidad Fernandez, 'The Filipino Woman,' editorial section *The Woman's Outlook*, (official publication of the National Federation of Woman's Clubs of the Philippines), 1923

## Introduction

The debate over women's suffrage became *the* site for the contest between various definitions of 'the Filipino woman' and by extension a debate about how much public space she may occupy (since from 1908 women were allowed into universities and the professions). The Philippine context is made complex by the fact that the country experienced two colonial rulers each imposing its own cultural construction of the feminine on Filipino society. The Spaniards left the Philippines in 1898 and the Americans began the universal system of public instruction in 1900.<sup>5</sup> Filipino men in the first half of the twentieth century also defined 'the Filipino woman' based on their distinctly different own agendas. Foremost in their agenda was the exclusion of women from formal political power. Caught in the crossfire, Filipino women consciously and cautiously negotiated these different notions of femininity.

The colonizer's cultural constructions of the feminine were products of their own gendered views and agendas for the social engineering of the colony. The shift from Spanish to American colonial rule had profound consequences for redefining 'the Filipino woman' in the space of two decades. The Spanish colonizers defined the 'feminine' as convent-bred, religious, charitable, demure, chaste and strictly located in the domestic sphere. In religious processions she sometimes marched as a beautiful queen (*reyna*) or *zagala* adorned with the family jewels.<sup>6</sup> Such a definition was an elite ideal since lower-class women continued to dominate the markets and were already in factory work in the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> The

colonial education policy helped maintain this 'ideal': while men were given opportunities for university education and permitted to enter the professions (though in politics they were only allowed to run for local and not national office), women were only given a very rudimentary education focusing on basic literacy, embroidery, cooking and music. Women (especially elite women) were groomed to be primarily wives and mothers, framed by the Catholic Iberian maternal icon. In nineteenth-century Spain, the representation of womanhood was embedded in the ideology of domesticity and motherhood – woman as 'Angel de Hogar,' or 'Angel of the House.' This ideology of domesticity 'reinforced the notion of lack of political subjectivity of Spanish women and the identification of the political sphere as male.'<sup>8</sup> Motherhood was the destiny of women and the binary separation of the private and public spheres meant that women's identities did not emerge from wage work.<sup>9</sup> Even in the early twentieth century when the 'Nueva Mujer Moderna' ('New Modern Woman') challenged the 'Angel de Hogar,' motherhood still shaped modern female identity: 'The definition of women's identity through motherhood was not contested in the early twentieth century, as it was still an essentially unquestioned cultural value.'<sup>10</sup>

This nineteenth-century Spanish colonial construction of 'the Filipino woman' transposed in Filipino soil, was epitomized by Jose Rizal's character Maria Clara in his novels *Noli Me Tangere* (*The Social Cancer*) and *El Filibusterismo* (*The Subversive*).<sup>11</sup> A shy, reticent (almost vapid) character, she is naïve and obedient to her parents. She is convent-bred, deeply religious and spends most of her teen years secluded from the vicissitudes of the real world, including misery and poverty. She is extremely beautiful, described as looking like the Virgin Mary. On her first encounter with a leper, surprised that there is misery in the world, she is moved to give him her precious locket because she had nothing else to give him. Her character is the romantic interest of the hero of both novels – Crisostomo Ibarra. In Ibarra's desire to educate his fellow *indios* he is branded a *subversive* (*filibustero*) by the Spanish friars and becomes a hunted 'rebel' at the end of the first novel, and a revolutionary in the second novel. Maria Clara, in contrast, is presented as too weak to stand up for the beliefs of the hero, betraying him to protect her mother and her biological father (a Spanish friar). Maria Clara, though a fictional character in a novel written by a Filipino, can be read as the Spanish construction of 'the Filipino woman': isolated from knowledge of politics and kept in the domestic sphere. She is a beauty in form and a Catholic saint in action. It may have been assumed that this 'Maria Clara' type of woman would embrace the Spanish colonial project and be reluctant to support active rebellion against the regime. This Iberian-influenced colonial construction of the Filipino woman located her in the domestic sphere, although civic work was expected of elite women who were supposed to show a concern for the underprivileged. It also imagined 'woman' as juvenile and ignorant. The

Spanish Civil Code enforced in the Philippines classified women alongside deaf mutes and morons (see below).

The Filipino women who were active participants in the Philippine revolution against Spain rejected that isolate, demure ideal. The women of Malolos petitioned the Spanish government requesting the opportunity to learn Spanish in the evenings.<sup>12</sup> Filipino women fought as soldiers and generals and died in battles. Others tended the sick, raised funds for the revolutionary cause, and shielded male revolutionaries by hiding them in their homes.<sup>13</sup> Some acted as spies and indulged in counterespionage activities.<sup>14</sup> A rejection of the Spanish colonial project also implied a rejection of the Hispanized construction of 'the Filipino woman.'

Spain's defeat in the Spanish-American War in 1898 ushered in a new colonial power. The USA had its own agenda for social engineering in the Philippines and this required yet another redefinition of the feminine. The Americans wanted to modernize Filipino women as part of the overall plan to modernize the colony. Hence, for the first time, women were allowed into universities and were given scholarships to study in the USA (as *pensionados*). University education gave women the opportunity to enter the professions, including pharmacy, business, law and medicine. Western medicine, health care and sanitation were also colonial priorities; and these fortuitously coincided with women's primary interests. The first women's organizations in the twentieth century focused on pre-natal care and the distribution of milk for babies. In politics, the colonial era was officially declared a 'period of democratic tutelage' during which Filipinos were to be instructed (by the American colonial masters) on the rudiments of democracy while the foundations of democratic institutions were laid (elections, political office, a free press, a professional bureaucracy, etc). Part of that tutelage meant Filipino men were permitted to run for elective office up to the national level. Perhaps as part of the increasing democratization, American governors-general from Francis Burton Harrison onwards (from 1918) supported women's suffrage.<sup>15</sup>

The American definition of the feminine was conflated with the ideal 'modern' woman: English-speaking, public school educated (preferably university educated, a professional or a 'clubwoman' active in civic work), and by the 1920s a suffragist (and thereby a participant in the American democratic project).<sup>16</sup> American women in the Philippines were instrumental in the organization of women's clubs that established puericultural centres, diet kitchens (where women learned to cook 'cheap but nutritious' recipes), distributed milk for babies and founded nursery schools. Mrs. Bessie Dwyer for instance was among the important pioneers of the National Federation of Women's Clubs and the wives of the American governors-general were active in club work. In 1912, noted American suffragist Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt visited Manila with the intention of beginning a suffrage movement there. But at that time, Filipino women

were not sufficiently interested in suffrage to begin a bonafide suffrage movement. Although the first public hearings where women presented the suffrage issue to the members of the legislature were held in 1918, it was only in 1921 when the National Federation of Women's Clubs (prior to that a civic organization) took up the suffrage cause was a full blown suffrage campaign launched. Why did the movement flourish in the 1920s? By that time women were not only already university graduates they were also founding universities of their own and entering the professions. Politics was the last frontier.

Filipino women (elite women in particular) welcomed the idea of the educated 'modern' woman. They were grateful to the Americans for giving them higher education; but they were adamant about their 'unique' brand of the 'modern educated woman.' This was publicly articulated in suffragists' dress (see below) and their strategy of non-militancy; a conscious attempt to distance themselves from British 'suffragettes.'

Most Filipino men on the other hand, opposed women's suffrage, even as late as the constitutional convention of 1934. Though it is true women had some allies among the male politicians and that by the 1920s the press had become pro-suffrage, the majority of Filipino men in political office were adamantly against enfranchising Filipino women. The quotations opening this chapter essentialized the debate in terms of whether or not 'Maria Clara' was to be held up as 'the Filipino woman.' Male opponents to women's suffrage wanted to revive the nineteenth-century Iberian 'Maria Clara' as the model for 'Filipino women.' The suffragists and their male allies claimed that 'Maria Clara' had already disappeared and that a new woman had taken her place.

Quintessential to definitions of 'the Filipino woman' was whether or not she would be permitted to enter all aspects of the public sphere. Women's education opened the professions to women. While this clearly placed them in the public sphere, the majority of Constitutional Convention delegates (read Filipino men) wanted to limit this public space to civic work and women's club work. They aspired to return women to the 'home.' Even though it was pointed out to them repeatedly that the presence of women in higher education and the professions meant women were already out of the home, they fought to halt the tide of women's emancipation from the private sphere.

Was the suffrage debate therefore about which colonial construct (the Spanish or the American) of 'the Filipino woman' should be endorsed in the twentieth century? Were the lines of pro- or anti-suffrage drawn clearly between those who were anti-suffrage/pro-Iberian construction of the feminine and pro-suffrage/pro-American colonial construction of the feminine?

### Suffragists' dilemmas

This chapter interprets the suffrage movement and the suffrage debates as the site where cultural constructions of 'the Filipino woman' were raised and negotiated. It explores how Filipino women responded to the dilemmas presented by the American colonial regime and argues that the narrative of nation building informed women's activities. Because they were involved in the revolution against Spain, they expected to be major participants in the process of nation building and naturally assumed that they would not be marginalized from political participation. As early as 1909, in *Filipinas* (a magazine by and for women, *por y para mujer*), elite Filipino women communicated their desire to be part of the nation-building process, arguing that to exclude women from participating in society was a crime against the nation's progress: 'To marginalise women from public life is equivalent to an attempt against the nation's prosperity.'<sup>17</sup> The magazine was adamant that women get an education for the benefit of the country. In 1909 political participation did not translate to demands for the vote. But the early feminists assumed that women would be acting political albeit *behind the scenes*. In 1909–1910 *Filipinas* published articles on international suffrage movements but did not yet lobby for suffrage for Filipino women. In 1905, Miss Concepcion Felix organized the *Asociación Feminista Filipina*. It was primarily a civic organization with the following aims: to oppose early marriage, to work for the regulation of work in factories and shops where women and children were employed, to work for the improvement of conditions of domestic service for women and children and to lobby for the nomination of women in the municipal and provincial boards of education.<sup>18</sup> This organization was interested in political and legislative change, and it had the beginnings of a feminist agenda because it also lobbied for women's political appointments in the provincial boards of education. Lobbying behind the scenes through their links with male politicians became an important strategy deployed from the very beginning of American colonial rule. But all these strategies were informed by women's assumptions that they were to be included as participants in the nationalist project – where male and female Filipinos demanded the chance to articulate and shape the future independent nation.

While Filipino men campaigned for the independence of the Philippines from colonial rule and demanded the right to negotiate its future; women's roles in that emerging nation were still contested. It was Filipino women's assumptions and desires that they be an important part of nation building and Filipino men's reluctance to share that space equally, which raised dilemmas for the suffragists. For Filipino men, supporting the nationalist project meant advocating immediate independence from America and working towards that goal. For Filipino women, supporting



the nationalist project meant lobbying for a government that would disenfranchise them as women.

What specific questions did the suffrage movement raise that immediately problematized the nationalist project from the women's perspective? First of all, the suffragists had to contend with the question: did supporting women's suffrage mean that they were supporting the colonial project? After all Filipino men were overwhelmingly against giving women the vote or even extending their political public sphere beyond civic work. On the other hand, American governors-general since Harrison were suffragists' advocates as they pressured Filipino male politicians (with addresses at the openings of each legislative session) to grant their women the franchise in keeping with democratic aims. Suffragists had to ponder: should they ally with the American colonial rulers rather than their Filipino male counterparts? Because they were committed to participating in the nationalist project, were they therefore going to put women's interests below 'national' interests? This dilemma came to a head in 1935 when women voters were asked to vote for a constitution (for the Philippine Commonwealth and later the independent republic), which disenfranchised them (although there was a provision that stipulated woman suffrage if in a plebiscite held two years after ratification, 300,000 women voted 'yes' to suffrage). Paradoxically women were allowed to vote for the ratification of a constitution but not to vote for politicians in office.

Does women's support of the modernizing project also indicate support for the colonial project? Women, after all, went to universities, but also founded women's universities, became professionals and organized women's clubs supporting health care and nutrition. Women's clubs established puericulture centres, diet kitchens and nursery schools. American governors-general supported these venues and often gave subsidies to some organizations such as the *Gota de Leche* and the National Federation of Women's Clubs (NFWC). Were women then clearly collaborating with the colonial project? While men were assured of their roles as politicians in the colonial and the future independent state, women were not. Although at the turn of the twentieth century women assumed that they would be part of the nation-building process this exercise of influence 'behind the scenes' was still dependent on men and their connections with men. Hence, education was an essential strategy in their attempts to prove their potential contribution to the future independent state. As will be shown below, it is women's access to education and their penetration into the professional (public) sphere that framed the arguments about women's suffrage.

Also, the suffragists had to ponder: is the suffragist an American colonial construct? After all Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt encouraged the suffrage movement, American women were instrumental in the history of the women's club movement (which later led to the suffrage movement), and American governors-general were clearly pro-suffrage. The American

colonial cultural construction of the feminine was: English-speaking, American educated, professional and pro-suffrage. If the suffragist was an American colonial construct, would it be un-nationalistic to embrace such a construction? Having just rejected the Hispanic colonial construction of the feminine and shunned 'Maria Clara,' would it be wise to embrace yet another colonial construction of 'the Filipino woman'? But the main problem was that their Filipino male counterparts wanted them to be 'Maria Clara,' a cultural construction they had just rejected!

### **Filipino men defining 'the Filipino woman'**

Apolinario Mabini made the earliest proposal for women's suffrage in the constitution he drafted for the Malolos Republic in 1899. In his draft he suggested qualified suffrage for women. Female taxpayers who were 21 years old and not subject to parental or marital authority would be allowed to vote (but not run for office).<sup>19</sup> This provision was written despite women's lack of interest. But Mabini's constitution was not adopted by the Malolos Congress and the subsequent constitution that was ratified did not enfranchise women. According to Pura Villanueva Kalaw her *Asociación Feminista Ilonga*, which she founded in 1906, had as one of its aims the enfranchisement of the Filipina.<sup>20</sup> In the early American colonial period, Filemon Sotto authored the first bill proposing enfranchisement for women in 1908 but it was not even discussed (opposition to it being almost overwhelming).<sup>21</sup> Another was introduced in 1912 by Melecio Severino and was likewise ignored by the Assembly.<sup>22</sup> The Jones Law, which took effect in 1916, required bills to pass both the Senate and the House of Representatives in order to become law. Suffrage bills were subsequently proposed by Mariano Cuenco of Cebu in 1917, and Gregorio Nieva. Both failed to pass.<sup>23</sup> In 1918, women appeared in a public hearing to present arguments for woman suffrage (apparently, the women were ridiculed by the men).<sup>24</sup> Although in 1919 the Senate passed a Woman Suffrage Bill (authored by Pedro M. Sison) the House of Representatives refused to pass it.<sup>25</sup> But the suffrage movement was well and truly launched only in the 1920s when the NFWC took up the issue and marshalled its membership of more than 300 clubs all over the country. Well organized and plugged into women's clubs in the entire country they had the numbers and nationwide links to lead the movement. In 1931 several more bills for woman suffrage were presented to the house accompanied by public hearings. A Woman Suffrage Bill was finally approved in 1933 giving women the right to vote on the same conditions as men.<sup>26</sup> The law was an amendment to section 431 of the Administrative Code.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, this amendment was tied to the Hare Hawes-Cutting Act, which did not pass the legislature. Instead the Tydings-McDuffie Independence Law laid the foundations for the Philippine Commonwealth. Because the law required the framing of a constitution,

the issue of woman suffrage needed to be debated all over again in the constitutional convention.<sup>28</sup>

The Convention was generally opposed to woman suffrage and eventually voted against it. Nonetheless women campaigned in favour of a constitution that disenfranchised them because they prioritized Philippine independence or the national interests above women's rights.<sup>29</sup> Besides the constitution contained a provision promising to extend suffrage to women if 300,000 women voted for it in a specially held plebiscite. The male delegates to the convention were largely anti-suffrage and the 300,000-vote requirement practically guaranteed failure.<sup>30</sup> Senator Rafael Palma (who was pro-suffrage) pointed out that in the census of 1918, only 417,000 women qualified to vote<sup>31</sup> (in the actual plebiscite there were 580,000 registered voters).<sup>32</sup> Faced with what seemed like insurmountable odds, the National Federation of Women's Clubs led the campaign for the vote using the media, and their links with women's clubs all over the Philippines. Clubwomen encouraged voter registration and the 'yes' vote. Superbly organized, the suffragists embarked on a tireless campaign, which gave them a landslide victory of 447,725 votes (44,307 women voted no).<sup>33</sup>

The binary divide between those pro and anti suffrage was inextricably tied to the cultural construction of 'the Filipino woman' and how much *more* space she should occupy in the public sphere. From the perspective of Filipino men the battle lines were drawn between two colonial constructs of 'the Filipino woman,' the Iberian-influenced Maria Clara and the 'modern' woman of the American regime. Even the *Philippines Free Press*, which became increasingly pro-suffrage by the 1920s clung to the notions of the feminine as 'beauty queen,' as mother in the domestic sphere and 'moral guardian'; a woman placed on a pedestal. Whenever a woman graced the pages of this political periodical it was as a beauty queen: a Carnival Queen or a Miss Philippines or as a contestant in the many beauty contests including Miss Philippines Free Press. On the other hand, *The Woman's Outlook*, *The Woman's Home Journal* and *La Mujer (Woman)* hardly if at all featured women as beauty queens, preferring to feature women 'firsts' (the first lawyer, the first doctor, etc.). The Philippine Association of University Women's (hereafter PAUW) *The Dawn* did show beauty queens but only very rarely. There was a stark contrast between the way women were featured in the mainstream newspapers and the periodicals of the women's organizations. In fact as the debates on the constitutional convention show (discussed below), men revealed nostalgia for the *dalagang Pilipina*, the shy timid woman who was beautiful and obedient. Although American policies had made that woman anachronistic men clung to that romantic image. One of National Artist Fernando Amorsolo's favourite subjects in the 1920s and 1930s (and even beyond) was rural scenes featuring this *dalagang Pilipina* dressed in traditional *balintawak* or *kimona*, shy, smiling, timid, posed against the backdrop of a never changing romantic rural landscape. By the 1920s this 'Filipino

woman' was disappearing.<sup>34</sup> Amorsolo's biographer Alfredo Roces argued that Amorsolo's paintings which were in the genre of the tourist's vision of the Philippines represented the Filipino's nostalgia for a rural countryside which remained untouched and romantic: 'obviously escapist in outlook, as were such popular arts of the time as the comics, pulp magazine stories and Tagalog movies.'<sup>35</sup> Amorsolo's paintings essentialized in visual art the image of 'the Filipino woman' most Filipino men wanted to keep. As the country experienced vast changes, some became sentimental for the imagined 'unchanging' countryside peopled by beautiful women in national dress winnowing rice or carrying water jars. In the midst of change women were still imagined as 'traditional.'



*Figure 2.1* Amorsolo painting 1930. From the private collection of Mr. and Mrs. Alfredo Roces.

Senator Rafael Palma was one of the few allies of the suffrage movement from its early days, discussing his support for women's enfranchisement even in private conversations with Governor General Leonard Wood.<sup>36</sup> His speech in November 1919 finally swayed the senate, which had in the past ignored the suffrage bill. In his lengthy speech Palma argued that once women were offered the opportunities for higher education on equal par with men, they should therefore be allowed to participate in all aspects of public life: 'women's suffrage is a consequence of women's education.'<sup>37</sup> According to Palma:

I cannot escape this conclusion. If women are offered equal opportunity as men in education and they are encouraged to become acquainted with worldly knowledge, the doors of public life must be opened to them so that they can fulfil their corresponding roles.<sup>38</sup>

Palma argued that because education prepared women for public roles, they must be given the opportunity to fulfil all these roles, which included political roles.

For Palma a new 'Filipino woman' had appeared in the public sphere. This 'Filipino woman' was a product of the American higher education policies:

The suffragist is a woman who is a product of our liberal times, educated like a man who knows and does not shirk from her family duties; but who is at the same time relatively free and quite simply believes in the need to share with men the duties conducive to their community's well being; she believes that just as in the home there are assigned duties to her sex, there are also duties to be performed in public life.<sup>39</sup>

Palma was steadfastly against the binary divide of women in the home and men in the public sphere.

Palma also appealed to democratic ideals (another American legacy). He argued that there would be no true democracy if half of its people/citizens were 'enslaved,' since women's confinement to the domestic sphere perpetuated the state of political and civil slavery.<sup>40</sup> Granting women the vote gave them the opportunity to defend their sex from male tyranny. The Civil Code (an inheritance from the Spanish colonial regime) for example classified women along with juveniles and those who are inferior in both mental and physical capacities.<sup>41</sup> Palma's speech delivered over two days succeeded in swaying the senate towards a unanimous vote in favour of suffrage.<sup>42</sup>

In 1934, more than a decade later, the very same arguments had to be raised once again in support of women's suffrage at a constitutional convention that was overwhelmingly against it. The debate was essentially

about constructing 'the Filipino woman.' Although the convention used two languages, English and Spanish, this linguistic divide did not translate into pros or antis. There were pros and antis who spoke in either language. Instead the divisions were based on how they defined 'the Filipino woman.' Those against women's suffrage wanted to keep women on a pedestal; these same men waxed eloquent about 'Maria Clara.' For example, Mr Abordo:

As I listened attentively to the speeches of the women, pro and con, I found that there exists a real demarcation line between the conservatives and liberals, the former championing the veritable heritage of the past, the prosecution of those sweet, glory and accomplishments in the person of Maria Clara, and the latter bent on a new conquest even at the risk of their sublime virtues.<sup>43</sup>

In the same breath he continued: 'I repeat, it is my living sentiment to place our women, beyond reproach and suspicion, on that pedestal of glory and unspotted and pure, revered and adored by us all.'<sup>44</sup> Abordo himself pointed out that the lines between pros and antis were drawn between the champions of 'Maria Clara' and those against 'her.'<sup>45</sup> 'Maria Clara' is invoked several times in the constitutional convention debates on women's suffrage.<sup>46</sup>

Advocates of suffrage repeated Palma's arguments: that granting women the vote was the 'democratic' and 'just' thing to do,<sup>47</sup> that the Civil Code needed amendment and, that future women politicians would introduce legislation to improve the status of women.<sup>48</sup> They also reminded their colleagues that suffrage had already been passed in 1933. It was therefore not fair that the constitution should now take the vote away from them.<sup>49</sup> Finally, they saw the granting of the vote as a sign of the country adopting a progressive stance, something that would place the Philippines alongside the other progressive nations internationally.<sup>50</sup>

In 1934 politicians also argued about how much public space to allocate women. Those who argued for the vote reiterated Palma's arguments in 1918 that higher education had given women the opportunity to enter the public sphere and the vote merely extended this sphere to include politics. Those against suffrage wanted to keep women's participation in the public sphere to civic work and participation in women's clubwork (which was still seen to be non-political). These solons also advocated limiting women's roles to the domestic sphere – the home.<sup>51</sup> They claimed that granting women the vote would destroy the harmony of home and family life since husbands and wives could disagree on the selection of particular candidates.<sup>52</sup> Although the pro-suffragists claimed that the harmony in the home was not threatened by the potential disagreement between sons and fathers<sup>53</sup> the arguments about women's place in the

domestic sphere and woman as queen of the home were extremely popular in the largely anti-suffrage convention.

Because the Constitutional Convention debate was about how men were going to define women (they assumed that men were the ones qualified to define 'the Filipino woman' and speak for all women), it was thus not surprising that 'the suffragist as American colonial construct' was raised by both sides. Those against suffrage were adamant that the Filipinos should not mimic American ways. Metaphorically waving the nationalist flag, anti-suffragists claimed: 'There is really one great weakness of the Filipino Race, more especially true of our Filipino women, and this is our susceptibility to everything foreign.'<sup>54</sup> Questioning women's allegiance to anti-colonialism they also reminded the audience that it was a Filipino woman who betrayed the Philippine revolution against Spain.<sup>55</sup> The irony of it all was that these 'nationalists' were clinging to another colonized definition of woman, even justifying women's lower status with the point that the Catholic Church did not permit women to say mass like priests and that God preferred to create man in His image.<sup>56</sup>

### **Filipino women constructing 'the Filipino woman'**

The suffragists did not overtly challenge the constructions of the nineteenth-century 'Filipino woman.' Motherhood ('intelligent motherhood') was officially endorsed as the 'noblest profession'<sup>57</sup> and the 'highest attainment of women'<sup>58</sup> and the 'home' was heralded as her main responsibility. *The Woman's Outlook* was founded by NFWC as a magazine '*de mujer a mujer*' (about women, by women) prioritizing activities central to the home – because home was where woman reigned. But because they argued that the home was an integral part of the nation, articles would focus on how public matters affected women.<sup>59</sup> In 1926, it was renamed *The Woman's Home Journal* officially claiming 'the home' as women's space. In its inaugural issue with the new title, it described itself as 'devoted to the interests of women and the home.'<sup>60</sup> Certainly the official discourse belaboured the point that they were not acting 'political,' though I suspect that at that time they may have meant 'non-partisan' or that they would not play party politics.<sup>61</sup> As late as 1941 on the eve of World War II the NFWC defined club activities as not political but educational! Mrs. Josefa Llanes Escoda begged women readers to convince their sex to exercise their right to vote (which she saw as the duty of a citizen) and encouraged clubwomen to 'also start studying the personal and official records of the candidates, attend meetings, study platforms, etc. These are educational rather than political activities. Let us try always not to involve the club proper in politics.'<sup>62</sup>

But contrary to these public declarations, the magazine led the campaign for women's suffrage, lobbied for pro-women legislation and

published bills and resolutions authored by women politicians (including local politicians). Although the title of the journal emphasized that the women's place was in the home, apart from the occasional article on beauty, child-raising, children's health and kitchen recipes, the magazine endorsed the philosophy that women should *go out of the home* in order to become better wives and mothers. The journal encouraged women to become club members – to move out of the domestic sphere and participate in the civic community. Articles such as 'Should a woman continue to work after she is married?'<sup>63</sup> and 'Can women combine a professional job and the home?'<sup>64</sup> answered the affirmative ('if the husband also has a profession that is of equal value or higher than the wife').<sup>65</sup> One particular piece grappled with the problem of women whose husbands did not want them to work. The prize-winning play on the topic of suffrage had as its plot a woman's attempts to delay her marriage until suffrage was won. Her fiancé was depicted also as supportive of the suffrage movement.<sup>66</sup> As soon as suffrage was 'won' the magazine announced that it was now legal for women to run for office. Although the magazine declared that it would not support any particular woman's candidacy because it was non-partisan,<sup>67</sup> it gave moral support to *all* women candidates. It published the names of women candidates, congratulated women winners by naming all women elected officials from councillor to national politics and later published legislation authored by these women.<sup>68</sup> In doing so, it celebrated women's actions in official political power. The magazine also discussed women's legal rights (including a page where women of any class could seek legal advice from women lawyers), and education for citizenship.<sup>69</sup> In September 1939, the League of Women Voters published a special page announcing their interest in propagating women as voters and their place in national life. Their special articles discussed 'education for citizenship' particularly 'how to choose a candidate.'<sup>70</sup> Even when the topic of women and marriage was raised, the articles focused on women's legal rights, the role of finances in married life, and the compatibility of couples. Thus, topics covered by the magazine's articles did not solely conform to the woman as housewife or homemaker implied by the journal's title.

These contradictions were also observed in *The Dawn* (the periodical of the PAUW) which had described itself as 'a non-partisan, non-sectarian monthly devoted to the Filipino women's interests'<sup>71</sup> and 'a magazine devoted to the defence of the rights and welfare of the Filipino woman.'<sup>72</sup> In 1935, the magazine was renamed *The Woman's World* because it wanted to contextualize the interests of women in the Philippines with women's interests around the world. It argued that the name *The Woman's World*, was 'a name more in keeping with the ideal which prompted the creation of this magazine: to help bring about rapid enlightenment to womanhood in the Philippines.'<sup>73</sup> Among the magazine's regular features were: 'for the good housewife,' 'welfare of the body,' menus, 'the social clinic' (an



advice column), 'the Filipinos and the Law' which gave legal advice for specific cases, and travel writing. In 1939 it fused with *The Woman's Home Journal*, becoming *The Woman's Home Journal-World*. Presenting a united front to the opponents of suffrage, these women did not challenge the notion that 'woman' should be conflated with 'the home' or that woman reigned at home. Instead, they chose to redefine 'home' and its parameters. They claimed that women should be involved in civic work and become good citizens in order to become better mothers and to create better homes (Trinidad Legarda quotes from Carrie Chapman Catt 'that a mother is a better mother when she is also a citizen').<sup>74</sup> As late as 1938 (after the 'vote' was 'won'), Josefa Escoda wrote: 'Besides, politics is men's profession – not women's. They are busy with many other important things – the care of the home.'<sup>75</sup> (I have deliberately chosen Escoda here because she later became not only the leader of the Girl Scout movement but an important figure in the underground resistance against Japan in World War II.)

The magazine *La Mujer* (in Spanish and English) also described itself as 'the magazine for the home.'<sup>76</sup> But in an article entitled 'Will Professional Women Make Ideal Wives?' writer Isabel Dy-Liacco chastised men who admired women primarily because they were good housekeepers. These men she advised, 'should simply employ housekeepers.'<sup>77</sup> Women who saw housekeeping as their be all and end all also received criticism.<sup>78</sup> Obviously, Dy-Liacco spoke from a middle-class perspective where families could afford housekeepers. But although the magazine officially conflated 'woman' with the 'home,' articles also idealized the professional, educated woman who did not make the 'home' her only concern.

Were women claiming that 'home' was their designated 'space' as part of a deliberate strategy to gain acceptance from the largely unsympathetic male community? The evidence seems to reply in the affirmative for the nineteenth-century constructions of 'the Filipino woman as beauty queen' and 'moral guardian' were not overtly challenged. A number of suffragists for example, held beauty titles. Well-known suffragist Pura Villanueva (later Kalaw) (president of the *Asociación Feminista Ilonga*) was the first Carnival Queen (1908). In 1918 she became president of the Women's Club of Manila and editor of the Spanish section of *Woman's Outlook*.<sup>79</sup> Her daughter, Maria Kalaw won the title of Carnival Queen in 1931 and joined the ranks of prominent suffragists along with her mother. Kalaw, a Barbour Scholar to the University of Michigan started a career as a journalist and became a senator in the 1950s. Paz Marquez (Queen in 1912) had by 1919 reinvented herself as one of the founders of Philippine Women's University (PWU), a suffragist and a university professor (and an excellent short story writer in English). She started the *Women's Journal* in 1919 and worked on the *Philippine Journal of Education* (the Philippine magazine for teachers founded in 1918).<sup>80</sup> Trinidad Fernandez (Queen in 1924) became editor of the English section of *Woman's Outlook*,<sup>81</sup> president

of the National Federation of Women's Clubs, and an important patroness of the arts particularly in her work with the Manila Symphony Society.

Since the suffragists' strategy was not to confront nineteenth-century definitions of the feminine, the campaign was never militant. According



*Figure 2.2* Postcard of Trinidad Fernandez Legarda as Carnival Queen in 1924. From the personal papers of Trinidad Fernandez Legarda in the custody of Dr. Benito Legarda, Jr.

to Encarnación Alzona Filipino suffragists deliberately dissociated themselves from the British 'suffragettes' who smashed windows:

The character of our women forbids them to resort to the militant methods employed by British women, for example. They will wait for the duly constituted authorities to pass the law which will enfranchise them. They have confidence in the sagacity of our legislators.<sup>82</sup>

This non-militancy Legarda claimed

was the best proof of our capacity to exercise the suffrage. We believe in our cause but we do not believe that to attain our end we have to resort to violent and drastic methods which would only reflect upon ourselves. We are of the conviction that good manners and soft words will bring the most difficult things to pass.<sup>83</sup>

The suffragists hoped to convince their male politicians that women should be given the vote through verbal and written arguments. Such a strategy had as its premise the belief that the men could be convinced by rational arguments rather than militant protest. The fact that some distinguished male politicians supported them (like Senator Rafael Palma) gave them reason to hope, and this strategic approach was applied consistently throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

But if women did not overtly challenge the definition of woman as mother and moral guardian, they very clearly rejected the Iberian Maria Clara embedded in the Spanish Civil Code which classified women alongside minors, deaf-mutes and morons. The PAUW for example, dedicated itself to the reform of the Spanish Civil Code.<sup>84</sup> It hoped to initiate legislative changes through lobbying behind the scenes with the male legislators. In this they were partially successful because they were able to influence the enactment of a number of significant changes. One was the approval of the Paraphernal Property Law, which 'empowered the wife to alienate, encumber or mortgage her paraphernal property without her husband's consent.'<sup>85</sup> (Paraphernal property was property the wife brought into the marriage from her inheritance.) They also inspired the passage of the Tirona Bill (Senate) and the Sumulong-Laurel-Ricohermoso-Fortich Bill (House) that required a wife's written consent before the husband could dispose of the conjugal real estate property.<sup>86</sup> They also pressured for the removal of provisions pertaining to the dowry system that were against 'traditional' (this word was undefined) Filipino practices.<sup>87</sup> These 'successes' confirmed the efficacy of their tactics (making concerted appeals to their male allies or taking their cause to the male legislators and trusting in their good sense). From these major victories the PAUW moved to expand their demands to include provisions such as (1) the right to engage in business, without requiring the husband's consent, and (2) uniform

grounds for divorce for both husband and wife.<sup>88</sup> The Spanish Civil Code permitted divorce (relative divorce if not absolute divorce) if the husband could prove adultery from the wife but the wife had to prove concubinage before she could ask for a 'divorce' (the women suffragists raised this inequality).

In actual fact, the alteration of the Spanish Civil Code had more radical implications for the status of woman and redefining 'woman' than women's enfranchisement. Interestingly, although male politicians were adamantly against granting women the vote, they were not averse to women's lobbying behind the scenes (though they did complain that women 'interfered' in politics). Paz Policarpio Mendez for example took personal credit for the Maternity Bill because she personally sought an appointment with Speaker Jose Yulo arguing that married women should be given compensation while on maternity leave.<sup>89</sup>

The attack on the Spanish Civil Code was justified with the argument that it was a vestige of the Spanish colonial past and therefore was a colonial construct of 'the Filipino woman.' Suffragists invoked 'the pre-colonial Filipino woman' who they claimed had equal rights in marriage and inheritance, who was financially independent in business and had religious power as well (as priestesses). (This was of course the suffragists' own perceptions of 'the pre-colonial woman' based on the few Spanish sources published on them, although some suffragists read material written by Filipinos such as Pedro Paterno.)<sup>90</sup> Suffragist Encarnación Alzona's book *The Filipino Woman: Her Social, Economic and Political Status 1565-1937* began with a description of women's status and activities in the pre-colonial period concluding that women 'enjoyed a measure of freedom which was unknown to the women of other Oriental countries'; because they had civil and political rights and 'were amply protected by the native laws.'<sup>91</sup> This attention to women's status in the pre-colonial past formed part of the suffragists' crucial argument. Framed in this paradigm suffragists seemed to be merely asking for rights women already enjoyed in the past but were lost to Spanish colonization:

The modern Filipino women who are demanding civil and political rights are in fact asking for no more than the restoration of their ancient rights and freedom, of which they have been deprived by the introduction of Spanish law by an alien ruler. The feminist movement in our country, should, therefore, be viewed in the light of this important historical fact.<sup>92</sup>

Paz Policarpio Mendez articulated this when she opened her article entitled 'Our Fight for Suffrage,' with:

The Filipino women's fight for suffrage is a struggle to regain rights and privileges they already enjoyed when they were free Malaysans.

The majority of our women do not know that prior to the coming of the Spaniards, they had practically the same rights and privileges as their menfolk, and that in the home, they were already financial arbiters.<sup>93</sup>

In *The Development and Progress of the Filipino Woman*, Dra Maria Paz Mendoza-Guazon emphasized women's high status in the pre-colonial era: 'Women were protected and respected. They acted as priestesses, and enjoyed the same rights as the men.'<sup>94</sup>

By bringing up women's status in the pre-colonial past, the suffragists distanced themselves from colonial constructions of the Filipino woman. They claimed that their campaign was merely an attempt to recoup rights lost to colonialism. In doing so they could claim that the campaign for suffrage fitted into the narrative of Filipino nationalism; a purging of the Spanish colonial construction of 'the Filipino woman.' Using the pre-colonial past as their inspiration would dispel criticisms that they were mimicking American colonial constructions of the 'modern woman.'

### **Dressing feminism, dressing suffrage**

The strategy of 'repackaging' the 'modern' 'Filipino woman' in the 'traditional' women's narrative is most visible in suffragists' chosen dress. Despite their public campaign for the wearing of Western dress as uniforms and as appropriate attire for the workplace, they themselves always wore Filipino native dress in the form of a *terno* and a *pañuelo*. Like the British 'suffragettes' who used colourful hats and dress to avoid arrest<sup>95</sup> (see Introduction), Filipino suffragists I argue, were probably aware of the semiotics of dress and its political implications.

Descriptions by Spaniards written in the sixteenth century isolate women's attire as consisting mainly of two pieces: the sarong and a small collarless jacket, shirt or doublet of the same material.<sup>96</sup> In the eighteenth century, the *baro't saya* or the Hispanized clothing for women became the dominant form of dress. The *saya* was the skirt while the *baro* was the blouse (not connected to the skirt but hanging loose). Since the *baro* was also made of fine cloth, a piece of cloth of the same fabric as the *saya* was worn over the *baro* to cover the breasts. This piece of cloth (which doubled as a veil) later evolved into the *pañuelo* (pichu). According to historians of the *terno*, the use of the *pañuelo* was an imposition of the Spanish missionaries on the Indian women who resisted undergarments.<sup>97</sup>

In the eighteenth century the *baro't saya* evolved into the *traje de mestiza*. The skirts became fuller when adapted to the fashion of the Spanish ladies. By the 1850s the sleeves of the *camisa* (blouse) became larger and tubular in shape. One style of the *traje de mestiza* popular in the 1880s was given the sobriquet 'Maria Clara' after a character in Jose Rizal's novel.<sup>98</sup>



Figure 2.3 Two women in Maria Clara Dress. From the book by J. Moreno, *Philippine Costume*, Manila: J. Moreno Foundation, 1995.

Around the time of the Philippine revolution against Spain (1895) the *camisa* became shorter and the *pañuelo* bigger and higher (becoming more of an accessory than an item for modesty). Then the *camisa* and *pañuelo* were starched.<sup>99</sup> In the American colonial era (1902–1946) the sleeves got shorter evolving from the bell-shape to the butterfly sleeves design associated with the *terno* today (though they were much bigger then). The butterfly sleeve design is created by stiffening the sleeves made possible by starching and with the use of *babarahin* material (starched



*Figure 2.4* A *terno* with *pañuelo* worn by Mrs. Pacita de los Reyes as Carnival Queen in 1929. This is a sample of the typical *ternos* of the era 1920s–1930s. Part of the collection of Mrs. Pacita de los Reyes-Phillips. From Salvador F. Bernal and Georgina R. Encanto, *Patterns for the Filipino Dress From the Traje de Mestiza to the Terno (1890s–1960s)* (Manila: Cultural Center of the Philippines, 1992), p. 45. Photography by Francis Escaler.

tulle). When the blouse was joined to the skirt and made of the same material the modern *terno* was born.

Suffragists (most of whom were involved in one way or another in women's education) argued that Filipino dress was impractical for daily wear; for example as uniforms for high school or university students or as

attire for the work place. Encarnación Alzona outlined the reasons why women students discarded the Filipino dress:

Going to school, rain or shine, has demonstrated the impracticability of the Filipino dress for daily wear and an active life, for its blouse, or what is called *camisa*, made of either *piña* or *sinamay* and heavily starched, cannot withstand exposure on rainy days. It becomes sticky and thus presents an ungodly sight, giving the wearer an uneasy feeling. The large, puffed sleeves of this blouse make it unfit and dangerous to wear inside laboratories with their gas jets or alcohol burners and rows of glass tubes. It was in fact the women students of the University of the Philippines who initiated in 1917 the wearing of the European dress for school purposes. Since then its use has spread to other schools, and now even women who have long left the school-room affect this dress. The popularization of outdoor sports, such as tennis and golf, has also compelled the Filipino women to affect a suitable costume. The gauzy, long-trained Filipino dress has now become, for a large number, a party dress for afternoon and evening wear.<sup>100</sup>

In her biography of suffragist Dra. Maria Paz Mendoza-Guazon she reiterated this point:

Until 1917 nearly all college women wore the traditional dress consisting of a long skirt with train, topped with a stiff blouse made of a fabric of cotton, abaca (*Musa textilis*), or piña with an open, canvas-like weave, whose sleeves were large, shaped like the wings of a butterfly, and worn with a detachable neckpiece of the same material. The girls from Luzon in addition, wore an overskirt of black lace. The ensemble was not only complicated but also unsuitable for the active academic life led by college women. Their attendance at laboratories with rows of Bunsen burners, microscopes, test tubes, and the like certainly required a dress that would not easily catch fire or some delicate apparatus as they moved about.<sup>101</sup>

'Modernization' required the abandonment of traditional dress when performing 'modern' tasks. Dra. Mendoza-Guazon campaigned for the adoption of Western dress in the University of the Philippines.<sup>102</sup> In her book *My Ideal Filipino Girl*, Guazon advocated the white uniform for school girls but recommended the Filipino costume for formal wear 'because it is our own; it is more suitable to us than the European evening dress which one cannot wear without exposing arms, neck and sometimes the back.'<sup>103</sup> But despite reservations about Filipino dress as appropriate for the new modern woman, suffragists deliberately wore the *terno* and *pañuelo* for all official occasions (especially if they were going to



be photographed, most Carnival Queens wore the *terno*, see above photo) and often to the work place. In fact the *terno* became so closely identified with the suffragists that one scholar has labelled them ‘*pañuelo* activists’ because they all wore the distinctive *terno* and *pañuelo* (pichu).<sup>104</sup> *The Woman’s Home Journal* advocated the *terno* and *pañuelo* (in the fashion pages Western style dress does not appear until 1936) and praised the ‘few’ Filipino women who wore the Mestiza dress to work.<sup>105</sup> One article named three NFWC women and Encarnación Alzona as examples of ‘modern’ women who wore the *terno* to work. One of NFWC women mentioned was Mrs. Sofia de Veyra, a prominent clubwoman and president of the NFWC (and the journal reports that she always wore the *terno* in public), who in 1931 won the *Philippines Free Press* readers contest for ‘The Woman in the Philippines I would Most Like to Be and Why.’<sup>106</sup> Other prominent NFWC women suffragists who always wore the *terno* for public occasions were: Trinidad Fernandez Legarda,<sup>107</sup> Pilar Hidalgo Lim, Josefa Llanes Escoda,<sup>108</sup> Josefa Jara Martinez, Concepción Felix Calderon and the educator/suffragist Francisca Tirona Benitez. According to a short biography of Josefa Llanes Escoda while the young Josefa was in the United States ‘she made it a point to always wear the Filipino dress (Mestiza dress)’<sup>109</sup> and a feature on her published in the *Philippines Free Press* in 1998 noted: ‘She always wore her attractive Filipino dress with butterfly sleeves wherever she went.’<sup>110</sup> The identification of these women with the *terno* and *pañuelo* was such that caricatures of them depicted them in this attire.

Women were already ‘modern’ women *but* they chose to ‘repackage’ their new selves in ‘traditional’ Filipino dress. Hence, although women were university educated, running universities and entering the professions and (by 1937) politics, they chose to present a ‘traditional’ and nationalist public face. According to Dr Benito Legarda Jr. his mother Trinidad Fernandez Legarda wore the *terno* and the *pañuelo* because it was the ‘nationalistic’ thing to do.<sup>111</sup> Eulalia Lim also confirmed this about her mother’s (Pilar Hidalgo Lim) reasons for wearing the *terno* and *pañuelo*.<sup>112</sup> Perhaps this was their deliberate strategy to blunt the radical changes – somehow they seemed less ‘modern’ and definitely nationalistic if they wore Filipino national dress at a time when formal wear for men was the Americana or Western suit and jacket (men did not use Filipino dress (the Barong Tagalog) as formal attire until President Ramon Magsaysay wore it for his inauguration in December 1953). Yet, women chose to wear the Filipino dress in the version of the *terno* and the *pañuelo* but *not* the Maria Clara. Thus, while presenting themselves as nationalists and as ‘Filipino’ women, even in dress, they had rejected Maria Clara.

The very first women politicians also wore the *terno* and *pañuelo* in public. Performing modern tasks attired in traditional dress was making a statement that women were still ‘traditional,’ ‘nationalistic’ and ‘Filipino.’ Unfortunately, this also conveyed the message that women were bearers of



Figure 2.5 Cartoon of Dr. Encarnación Alzona by cartoonist Gat probably published in *The Manila Chronicle*, no date. From the Personal Papers of Encarnación Alzona, Ateneo Library of Women Writers (ALIWW), Ateneo de Manila University.

'tradition' and 'nation' while men (in Western suits since in the American colonial era Filipino men of prominence and politicians always wore Western dress – the American suit called the *Americana*) were identified with political power and modernity.



Figure 2.6 Cartoon of Josefa Jara Martinez published in *The Manila Bulletin* in 1994.

## Conclusion

Although they were marginalized from the official debates on how ‘the Filipino woman’ was to be constructed, suffragists hoped to influence the outcome by being proactive in rejecting ‘Maria Clara’ openly. They embraced the American colonial construct of the ‘modern’ woman, but were careful to present the ‘new woman’ in Filipino dress and did not overtly challenge cultural constructions of the woman as ‘wife and mother,’ as beauty queen and as civic worker. They did not oppose the view that the ‘home’ was woman’s primary sphere although they did argue that women needed to go outside the home and perform civic work in order to become better homemakers. Their strategies proved successful in the end: they won the vote and on the eve of the war were already exercising official and unofficial power. These early feminists were actually

radically different from the Maria Clara of the nineteenth century. Perhaps if they chose to focus on the radical difference between the new American construction of 'the Filipino woman' that they endorsed and the nineteenth-century woman who was their 'mother,' they might have received much more resistance from Filipino men and Filipino society. But their choice to present themselves publicly as non-militant, non-aggressive women who still glorified motherhood and the 'home'; and beautiful women closely identified with civic work, made their new demands for political power and equality in civil law seem less threatening. Lobbying for women's equality seemed less 'modern' if the lobbyist was dressed in a *terno* and a *pañuelo*. In actual fact, the Filipino woman had come a long way.

These strategies, however, had long-term consequences both for defining 'the Filipino woman' and for the feminist movement. Although women could now become politicians, the path to women's official political power was through women's activities in civic organizations or women's reputations as beauty queens. A close look at women politicians in the post-war years reveal a clear pattern of association either with civic work or beauty titles. Female power was still associated with the woman as beauty queen and the woman as moral guardian.<sup>113</sup> Women were still defined as 'wife and mother.'<sup>114</sup> Filipino 'first-wave' feminism had succeeded in giving women political power but not in radically altering nineteenth-century definitions of the feminine. It would be the militant nuns in the 1970s (ironically also women as moral guardians) and women's organizations that in the midst of a political dictatorship would challenge these cultural constructions of the feminine. Nuns this time chose to use militancy in the face of a macho military authoritarian regime. Perhaps because they were nuns, ambivalent women unattached to men (though ironically still moral guardians), they were less afraid to confront the enduring gender narrative.<sup>115</sup>

## Notes

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- 2 Discurso del Sr. Joven, *Constitutional Convention Record* (hereafter CCR), no. 9, 2 November 1934, p. 556.
- 3 Discurso del Delegado Lim, CCR, no. 81, 5 November 1934, p. 73.
- 4 Trinidad Fernandez, 'The Filipino Woman,' editorial, *The Woman's Outlook* (hereafter TWO), April 1923, p. 18.
- 5 Glenn Anthony May, *Social Engineering in the Philippines: The Aims, Execution, and Impact of American Colonial Policy 1900–1913*, Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1984, pp. 78–9.

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- 7 Ibid., and Ma. Luisa Camagay, *Working Women of Manila in the 19th Century*, Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press and University Center for Women's Studies, 1995.
- 8 Mary Nash, 'Un/Contested Identities: Motherhood, Sex Reform and the Modernization of Gender Identity in Early Twentieth-Century Spain,' in Victoria Lorée Enders and Pamela Beth Radcliff (eds), *Constructing Spanish Womanhood: Female Identity in Modern Spain*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999, pp. 25–49.
- 9 Ibid., p. 28.
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- 11 Jose Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*. Charles Derbyshire's translations entitled *The Social Cancer*, Manila: Philippine Education Company, 1912, 1976, and *The Reign of Greed*, Manila: Philippine Education Company, 1912, 1974.
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- 14 Regino P. Paular and Augusto V. de Viana, 'Women Katipunero's Counterespionage Activities,' in *Kumerensiya '93*, Baguio and Benguet: University of the Philippines Kolehiyo sa Baguio and Benguet State University, 1995, pp. 63–77.
- 15 Francis Burton Harrison, 'Mensaje del Ejecutivo El Gobernador General Leyendo,' *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Representantes*, Cuarta Legislatura Filipina, Tercer Período Ordinario y Segundo Período Extraordinario de Sesiones, 16 de Octubre de 1918, Session 1, p. 5 (kept at the Batasan Archives, Manila), and Pura Villanueva Kalaw, *How the Filipina Got the Vote*, Manila: [n.p.], 1952, p. 12.
- 16 The cultural construction of the Filipino male also meant the *Sajonista* or the *modernista* politician (he was English-speaking, American educated and pro-American). *Sajonista* was the word used to describe the pro-American Filipino, a term which by the 1920s became synonymous with *modernista* (modern). See Nick Joaquin, 'Pop Culture: The American Years,' in Alfredo Roces (ed.), *Filipino Heritage*, vol. 10, Manila: Lahing Pilipino, 1978.
- 17 'La Mujer Ante La Política,' *Filipinas*, 22 de Noviembre de 1909, 244.
- 18 See Concepción Felix De G. Calderón, *First Report Philippine Woman's Club* (or Dr. Fernando G. Calderon, 'The Causes and Remedies of the Infant Mortality in Manila'), Manila: Asociacion Feminista Filipina, 1905, in Bureau of Insular Affairs, Record Group 350, Box 777, No. 17087, National Archives Records Administration, College Park, Maryland, Washington, DC. See also Constitution of the *Asociación Feminista Filipina* [n.p.], 1905.

- 19 Dr. Encarnación Alzona, 'The History of Woman Suffrage in the Philippines,' *The Woman's Home Journal* (hereafter *WHJ*), vol. XII, 12, 1937, 15.
- 20 Kalaw, *How the Filipina*, p. 7. Apart from this source I have not been able to locate any other evidence to show that suffrage was something women's organizations publicly advocated in 1906. Alzona certainly does not mention it in her accounts of the history of the suffrage movement. In 1912, women did not support Catt's proposal to begin a suffrage movement in the Philippines even though her guests included Concepción Felix, founder of the *Asociación Feminista Filipina*. The earliest public demand for suffrage by women seemed to be the hearings in 1918.
- 21 Alzona's history says it was first introduced in 1912 but there was one in 1908. See also Kalaw, *How the Filipina*, p. 7.
- 22 Alzona, 'The History,' p. 16.
- 23 Ibid., p. 18.
- 24 I have been unable to locate the women's speeches and the men's responses. Since it was a 'hearing' and not a regular session of the legislature, no transcripts were kept in the Senate or Congressional archives. But suffragists Pura Villanueva Kalaw and Encarnación Alzona mention the ridicule in their writings, but do not give specific examples. Kalaw, *How the Filipina*, p. 15, and Encarnación Alzona, *The Filipino Woman: Her Social, Economic and Political Status 1565-1937*, Manila: Benipayo Press, 1934, p. 75.
- 25 Alzona, 'The History,' p. 20.
- 26 Ibid., p. 79.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid., p. 80.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Kalaw, *How the Filipina*, pp. 33-4, 42.
- 31 Dr. Rafael Palma, 'The Significance of May 14, 1937,' *WHJ*, vol. XII, 12, 1937, 28.
- 32 Kalaw, *How the Filipina*, p. 42.
- 33 Ibid., p. 44.
- 34 Alfredo Roces, *Amorsolo*, Manila: Filipinas Foundation, 1975, see paintings and pp. 90, 180; Alfredo Roces, 'Amorsolo: Painter of the American Time,' in Alfredo Roces (ed.), *Filipino Heritage*, vol. 10, Manila: Lahing Pilipino, 1978, pp. 2612-19.
- 35 Roces, 'Amorsolo: Painter of the American Time,' pp. 2616-17.
- 36 Diaries of Leonard Wood, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, entry for 1 July 1921.
- 37 'Discurso de Sr. Palma en Favor del Proyecto,' *Diario de Sesiones del Senado de Filipinas*, 22 Noviembre 1919, 110; also reprinted in Rafael Palma, 'El Sufragio Femenino en Filipinas,' *The Philippine Review*, January 1920, 44.
- 38 Ibid. My translation from the original.
- 39 Continuación, El Sr. Palma, 'Discurso,' *Diario de Sesiones del Senado de Filipinas*, 25 Noviembre 1919, 118, and Rafael Palma, 'El Sufragio,' 51. My translation from the Spanish original.
- 40 'Discurso de Sr. Palma,' 22 Noviembre 1919, 111, and Rafael Palma, 'El Sufragio,' 45.
- 41 'Discurso de Sr. Palma,' 22 Noviembre 1919, 111, 25 Noviembre 1919, 113-14, and Rafael Palma, 'El Sufragio,' 44-5.
- 42 *Diario de Sesiones del Senado de Filipinas*, 1 Diciembre 1919, p. 146.
- 43 'Discurso del Sr. Abordo Contra El Sufragio Femenino,' *CCR*, no. 74, 26 October 1934, 383.
- 44 Ibid.

- 45 'Discurso del Sr. Abordo Contra El Sufragio Femenino,' *CCR*, no. 74, 26 October 1934, 383.
- 46 'Discurso del Sr. Joven,' *CCR*, no. 79, 2 November 1934, 556; 'Discurso del Delegado Lim,' *CCR*, no. 81, 5 November 1934, 73; 'Discurso del Delegado Grafilo,' *CCR*, no. 74, 26 October 1934, 369; 'Discurso del Sr. Abordo Contra El Sufragio Femenino,' *CCR*, no. 74, 26 October 1934, 383; 'Discurso del Sr. Carin Contra El Sufragio Femenino,' *CCR*, no. 77, 30 October 1934, 488; 'Discurso del Sr. Cuaderno A Favor Del Sufragio Femenino,' *CCR*, no. 79, 2 November 1934, 566.
- 47 'Discurso del Delegado Abella Por Camarines Sur,' *CCR*, no. 72, 24 October 1934, 318–19, 324; 'Discurso del Señor Vinzona a Favor del Sufragio Femenino,' *CCR*, no. 73, 25 October 1934, 366; 'Discurso del Señor Palma,' *CCR*, no. 76, 29 October 1934, 439.
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- 49 'Speech of Delegate Sandoval,' *CCR*, no. 76, 26 October 1934, 471.
- 50 'Discurso del Sr. Abella,' *CCR*, no. 32, 25 August 1934, 36–7; 'Discurso del Delegado Abella Por Camarines Sur,' *CCR*, no. 72, 24 October 1934, 316, 324; 'Discurso del Sr. Vinzons a Favor del Sufragio Femenino,' *CCR*, no. 73, 25 October 1934, 358 and 365.
- 51 'Discurso del Señor Altavas,' *CCR*, no. 72, 24 October 1934, 305; 'Discurso del Delegado Alvero de Romblon Ante La Convención Constitucional,' *CCR*, no. 75, 27 October 1934, 415–16; 'Discurso del Señor Carin Contra El Sufragio Femenino,' *CCR*, no. 77, 30 October 1934, 488.
- 52 'Speech of Mr. Perfecto Balili Against Woman Suffrage,' *CCR*, no. 18, 21 August 1934, 415–19; 'Discurso del Señor Altavas,' *CCR*, no. 72, 24 October 1934, 304–5, 314; 'Discurso del Señor Arellano,' *CCR*, no. 76, 29 October 1934, 445.
- 53 *Ibid.*, p. 453.
- 54 'Discurso del Delegado Jose de Guzman,' *CCR*, no. 72, 24 October 1934, 339; 'Discurso del Delegado Grafilo,' *CCR*, no. 74, 26 October 1934, 373; 'Discurso del Señor Escareal,' *CCR*, no. 78, 31 October 1934, 534–5.
- 55 Mr. Grafilo in 'Discurso del Delegado Abella por Camarines Sur,' *CCR*, no. 72, 24 October 1934, 330–1; 'Discurso del Delegado Binag,' *CCR*, no. 81, 5 November 1934, 46.
- 56 'Discurso del Señor Paredes,' *CCR*, no. 80, 3 November 1934, 604; 'Discurso del Delegado Cea en Favor Del Sufragio Femenino,' *CCR*, no. 81, 5 November 1934, 53; 'Discurso del Señor Arellano,' *CCR*, no. 76, 29 October 1934, 443; 'Contestation,' in 'Discurso del Señor Caram,' *CCR*, no. 79, 2 November 1934, 550.
- 57 Mrs. Winifred O'Connor Pablo, 'A New Attitude for Professional Women,' *The Dawn*, vol. 1, 7, 1934, 8.
- 58 'But beneath and above all these peptonized intellectuality and material proofs of the success of feminine endeavor and women's careers, the highest attainment of women still continues to be motherhood – intelligent motherhood – which is the foundation of a nation's strength and the salvage rock of the unity and stability of the nation.' Editorial (Trinidad Fernandez), 'The Highest Attainment of Women,' *TWO*, vol. 1, 2, 1922, 18.
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- 60 *WHJ*, Year 1, 1, 1926, 1.
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- 75 Josefa Ll. Escoda, 'In Defense of Our Women,' *WHJ*, vol. XIII, 8, 1938, 16.
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### 3 Chinese women's campaigns for suffrage

#### Nationalism, Confucianism and political agency

*Louise Edwards*

The women's suffrage campaign in China occurred during the period of anxiety-prone experimentation with democratic systems between the decline of the Qing Imperial government (1911) and the rise of the revolutionary Communist government (1949).<sup>1</sup> Unlike many of the other national movements discussed in this volume, Chinese women activists waged their campaign for gender equality in a nation that had peripheral experience of colonial domination – Europeans only colonised a few port cities. For the most part, imperialism and the internal instability it produced, rather than colonialism, was the major international threat to the establishment of a Chinese-run democracy complete with gender equity. Local conservatism on gender issues – revolving around notions of Confucian patriarchy and national identity – presented the domestic hindrance to gender equity in politics. Within this context China produced a uniquely Chinese women's suffrage movement. As will become clear below, the Chinese inflections to the global suffrage movement were produced first from within the tensions between Confucianism and nationalism, and later in the stress fractures between the divergent notions of revolution promoted by the Communist Party (CCP) and the Nationalist Party (GMD).

In order to provide a broad historical background of twentieth-century Chinese political history the chapter will first offer an overview of the main waves of suffrage activism. It then moves to explore the influence of Confucianism on the shape and agenda of the early suffrage movement. In the last section of the chapter I examine the impact of the tensions between the CCP and the GMD on women active in Chinese political life.

#### **Historical overview**

The Chinese women's suffrage movement is distinguished by three main phases. The first phase is that of the initial two years of the Republican period – between 1911 and 1913 – during which China's elite dabbled unsuccessfully with democracy in the aftermath of the collapse of the Qing dynasty. The second period is that between 1919 and 1927 when the

iconoclastic New Culture Movement stirred up a nationalist, anti-Confucian fervour. The third period commenced in 1936 – after the inclusion of gender equality in the May 5th draft constitution – and continued until 1946 when the chaos of the civil war left China devoid of a stable government. Between 1936 and 1946 women's suffrage activists sought a set minimum quota of seats in parliament to guarantee a female presence in any future Chinese parliament.<sup>2</sup> These three stages relate primarily to key political events in the history of the Republic of China prior to its isolation on the island of Taiwan in 1949. However, they are also instructive in presenting historians of women's suffrage with a framework for understanding the uniquely Chinese deployment of women's suffrage rhetoric, methods and philosophy.

The first women's suffrage activists were located within the anti-Qing, pro-Republican movement of the first decade of the twentieth century. These women were outraged at China's weakness internationally and pressed for a major overhaul of China's political system – nothing less than the replacement of the monarchy with a representative parliament. At the end of the nineteenth century China had experienced a humiliating military defeat by Japan and in 1900 experienced further disgrace as Europe, the US and Japan combined to defeat China in the Boxer War. To restore China to a position of international respectability and save her from dismemberment and decay, radical women in China advocated the violent overthrow of the monarchy.

To this end, China's first 'suffragettes' were primarily members of the pro-Republic party – Sun Yatsen's Revolutionary Alliance. The Alliance recognised women members as equal to men and so China's first women's rights activists forged strong networks of support from within this party in the early years. The women were committed to the Republican cause, since the establishment of a system of popular representation was a fundamental prerequisite for women to be able to exercise political power of any sort. There was no suffrage at all in the Qing monarchy of 1900 – let alone women's suffrage. Ding Chuwo described a 'direct link between women's rights (*nüquan*) and people's rights (*minquan*).' 'If you want to create a nation, you must first create a family; if you want to build citizens, you must first build women. The political revolution emerges when striving for the freedom of the entire body of citizens.'<sup>3</sup>

Women's involvement in the anti-Qing movement included a full range of revolutionary activities – bomb-making, arms-smuggling, intelligence gathering and dissemination as well as leading assassination squads and women's armies. They were also active in producing anti-Qing propaganda to increase support for the Republican movement – women published rousing manifestos and inflammatory articles and were central to the creation of an intellectual dimension to the Republican movement. Much of their rhetoric was racist in overtone – the Qing dynasty was a

Manchurian dynasty and had to be overthrown to restore China to Han rule.<sup>4</sup> The female members of the Revolutionary Alliance also held a radical vision for social change in China. The nationalist agenda of the women went hand-in-hand with a bid to make radical changes to the family structure and the abject submission of women to men within a Confucian social and moral order. Women were regularly referred to as the slaves of slaves. Chinese men were enslaved by foreign oppressors (Manchus) and Chinese women were enslaved by Chinese men.

An article in one of China's first feminist journals explained the connection between women, slavery and citizenship. Luo Yanbin, activist and publisher, wrote in her *China's New Women's World* of a fantasy tale where the protagonist undertakes a journey to seek the meaning of the term 'Female Citizen' (*nü guomin*) in an ancient dictionary. The journey to find the word 'woman' (*nüzi*) involves a journey to a dark, threatening place. 'There was a deep hole leading under the ground. Looking down one was presented with a series of levels connected by small ladders and . . . on the first level was the word for "slaves." . . . Underneath "slaves" was the level for the word "woman" (*nüzi*).'<sup>5</sup> On the 'woman' level a great ocean of blood and tears stretched to eternity, filled by the centuries of women's misery. This dismal picture of China's women being lower than slaves and burdened with limitless misery simultaneously reflects the injustice of the position of women in China and acknowledges the difficulties of the struggle ahead. Slaves are denied equality with slave-owners but women are even denied equality with slaves.

The narrative of citizenship that the women activists promoted during this period was premised on gender equality inspired by European notions of Natural Rights. Natural Rights to equality and liberty made no distinction between men and women. China's foremost woman martyr from this period, Qiu Jin (1875?, 1877?-1907), challenged women to action in a poem entitled 'Striving for women's rights' which encapsulates the understanding of natural rights and their connection to women's liberation. She declared, 'Ours is a generation that loves freedom, we strive for freedom in one single cup of wine. Equal rights for men and women is endowed by nature, how then is it that you willingly live in subordination?'<sup>6</sup>

With the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911, China embarked upon a tumultuous two-year experiment with parliamentary democracy. The women within the Republican movement were quick to press the case for gender equality demanding that this be enshrined in the new, national Constitution. To this end they formed women's suffrage groups across the nation in the last few months of 1911 and the start of 1912 in a bid to prevent the conservatives within China's politically active elite from reaffirming Han Confucian patriarchy.

In February of 1912, the women's suffrage activists submitted a memorial to the Provisional President, Sun Yatsen, declaring:



The political revolution has already taken place and the social revolution will follow in the future. To ensure that the social revolution is not a miserable failure we must first strive for social equality. To strive for social equality we must first seek gender equality. To strive for gender equality we must first have women's right to participate in politics. . . . We request that the constitution clearly specify equality regardless of gender, and also declare explicitly gender equality in the right to vote and stand for election.<sup>7</sup>

Their fears that conservative forces would override Sun's Revolutionary Alliance's platform of gender equity were very quickly realised. The Provisional Parliament comprised a number of interest groups that had been active in the late Qing experiments with provincial democratic reforms and these men conceived of a Han democracy that reasserted Han culture – grounded in patriarchy at both the public and private levels. Thus, the Constitution passed by the Provisional Parliament in March of 1912 denied women equal political rights with men.

The women suffrage activists knew that an important opportunity had been lost. They felt that the broader battle for women's equal rights with men in the family and workplace would be hampered by the absence of women in the national parliament. Their sense of dismay was intense. In imitation of the British suffrage activists, women in Nanjing rallied outside the legislative chambers, smashed windows, kicked security guards and stormed the chambers (see Figure 3.1).<sup>8</sup> The parliamentarians told the women to 'go and get educated about politics' and once this was achieved they could return to press the case for a constitutional amendment. This was but one of the low-points the women's rights activists were to face in 1912 – the ultimate betrayal by their own Party was imminent. By August of 1912 the Revolutionary Alliance merged with more conservative parties to form the GMD. In this process, the Alliance traded away the clause from their Party constitution relating to gender equality. At the meeting on the vote to remove gender equality from the GMD manifesto, the prominent suffragist Tang Qunying walked across and slapped the President of the party, Song Jiaoren, on the face as a measure of her disgust.<sup>9</sup> Abandoned and humiliated by their own Revolutionary Alliance the women could no longer count on Alliance representative support and advocacy for their cause within the Parliament.

China's suffrage activists also invoked the international nature of their movement through well-publicised links with the international suffrage movement. In September 1912 Chinese suffragists hosted women from the International Women's Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) led by eminent American suffragist Carrie Chapman Catt. Catt spoke at meetings and rallies in China's premier political cities – Nanjing, Shanghai and Beijing.<sup>10</sup> The events drew strong attendances including one rally in Nanjing which attracted over a thousand people.<sup>11</sup>



Figure 3.1 Women's suffrage activist with natural feet kicking a policeman during a protest in Nanjing. From *Shen Bao*, 30 March 1912. The author would like to thank B. Mittler for drawing her attention to this cartoon.

However, within two years the parliament and the constitution that excluded women from participation in its chambers were to collapse. The first President of the Republic, Yuan Shikai (he assumed power from the Provisional President, Sun Yatsen) quickly revealed his intention to re-establish a monarchy (with himself as Emperor). By November 1913 major restrictions on political activity were in place. Yuan Shikai's thugs assassinated Song Jiaoren, in a further bid to eliminate opposition voices. The main coalition of feminist groups, the Women's Suffrage Alliance, was banned and the movement's leaders fled into hiding either in rural China or overseas.<sup>12</sup> Thus ended the first wave of women's suffrage activism in China. Tangled with the anti-Qing, pro-Republican movement, the women's campaign for equality needed to be sufficiently independent of nationalist or racist rhetoric to generate results for women.

By the time the second wave of suffrage activism emerged in 1919, China had undergone a series of political and cultural revolutions. Yuan Shikai failed in his campaign for the position of Emperor – dying in 1916. From this point military strongmen controlled much of the country and ineffectual, squabbling politicians in major cities appeared unable to

defend China's interests in national or international forums. New ideas were circulating in the urban areas that challenged the utility of Confucianism to the modernisation of China. Traditional pillars of social order – the authority of elders, traditional Chinese education, patriarchy and arranged marriages – all faced direct attack in magazines like *New Youth*. In this new milieu – known as the New Culture Movement – women's issues gained public prominence as never before.<sup>13</sup> Women's emancipation from Confucian moral codes became a key site of struggle for the growing numbers of radical youth in China at the time.

By the 1920s some of China's provinces had managed to re-establish a semblance of political and military stability. China's women's movement emerged from half a decade of chaos and radical reinvention of 'Chineseness' with broader popular support – a key aspect missing in 1911. Overall, China's women's suffrage movement was in a stronger position than it had been ten years earlier – it was numerically stronger, had greater and wider public support than ever before and the failure of the previous national constitution indicated that a new document would have to be written. China's democracy advocates of the first half of the century were firm believers in the power of a constitution to create order, wealth and broad prosperity. In this new climate, as soon as political order was restored in any given province a women's suffrage group emerged to press the case for gender equality at the *provincial* level. Success was quick to appear. By 1921 Hunan's provincial constitution guaranteed women equal political rights with men and by the winter of that year, a woman had been elected to parliament. Guangdong, Sichuan and Zhejiang followed quickly.<sup>14</sup>

During this New Culture Period of intellectual and political rejuvenation, China's two most important political parties emerged. The GMD was first formed in 1912 but required a major overhaul to be relevant in the new times. Sun Yatsen finished this task in 1923 when, with the support of the USSR, he completed the revamping of the GMD. In 1921 a completely new party had been formed – the Chinese Communist Party. Both groups affirmed gender equality in their party documents and devoted some effort to winning supporters among the growing numbers of newly radicalised women. The campaigners for gender equality in the provincial constitutions were usually aligned with the GMD. Under the advice of the Comintern, the GMD was persuaded to allow CCP members to become members of the GMD as a 'party within a party.' This alliance of the nationalist left wing was fraught with tensions and by 1927 these became untenable. The GMD began a brutal purge of the CCP members of the party. Within the GMD, CCP members had dominated the Women's Bureau and accordingly many women activists faced persecution, imprisonment and execution as the GMD sought to eradicate CCP influence from the country and from the party. Executions of 'radical' women were conducted throughout the country – Leslie Collins notes that 'over 1000 women leaders were killed in China in 1927 by KMT [GMD]

rightists; many of them were not Communists but simply active participants in the women's movement.<sup>15</sup> In this climate the women's suffrage movement faced a huge challenge. Politically active women were forced to make stark choices – to align themselves with one or the other of the main parties or to assume a position of non-alignment.

After 1927, the women who remained with the CCP became less influential in the suffrage campaigns in the urban areas – but they were able to take the suffrage cause to the rural areas. Those who remained outside the CCP continued to lobby the now-national government for gender equality in political and legal rights. Hints that their campaign would be successful came with the 1930 Tutelage Constitution that guaranteed gender equality. By 1936, the first draft of a National Constitution was released and this confirmed women's equal political position with men. With their position as politicians now affirmed China's women's suffrage activists moved to a third stage.

China's 'suffragettes' had been keen observers of international trends in women's engagement with politics. They were aware that winning the right to vote and stand for parliament did not necessarily guarantee that women would actually enter parliament. They realised that to prevent women being passed over in pre-selection battles some system of guaranteed quotas would have to be implemented. Their campaign then moved from a philosophical base of 'all human beings are equal regardless of gender' to one that was underpinned by the notion that 'women were different after all – they needed special protection.' This campaign continued through the war years and was waged in the wartime parliament – the People's Political Council (PPC) – where women were represented by a number of long-term suffrage activists like Liu Wang Liming, Shi Liang and Wu Zhimei.<sup>16</sup> Success for this campaign came in 1946 with the promulgation of the national constitution that guaranteed women a minimum of 10 per cent of all seats in each level of the legislature. Although this constitution was scarcely felt on the mainland, it has continued to ensure women's representation in politics on the island of Taiwan for more than half a century.<sup>17</sup>

These three waves comprise the evolution of the women's suffrage movement in China. However, this brief overview of events obscures the major epistemological shifts in the movement over the course of its half-century. China's suffrage activists were not simply active in response to major political events – such as the collapse of the Qing, or the death of Yuan Shikai – they waged their campaign in the context of a rupturing Han patriarchy informed as it was by Confucianism and Nationalism.

### **Confucianism and women's suffrage**

At the start of the twentieth century Confucianism had dominated politics in China – both national and familial – for centuries. The resilience of this

fundamentally patriarchal political philosophy over so many different dynasties suggested that it would be a formidable opponent to the women's suffrage cause. Stability, hierarchy and filial piety were key aspects of the Confucian worldview. The power structures within Confucianism were entirely patriarchal. Men had sole access to the right to wield official power. Women could influence men through their family positions – most legitimately through their prestigious status as mothers and grandmothers. But, as lovers, wives and concubines women's influence over men was regarded as likely to cause chaos and instability in the family, the village/town/city and the country. Thus, the campaign to win formal, public political power for women faced entrenched cultural norms that regarded women as completely inappropriate agents of official power. Moreover, women were considered dangerous even if they attempted to seek political influence through unofficial power. In this regard, power, both formal and informal, was gendered male. However, embedded within this schema, as Susan Mann has deftly demonstrated, learned wives were expected to serve an advisory and counselling role to their husbands in their daily political or business decisions.<sup>18</sup> This uniquely Chinese rationale for gendered governance would require peculiarly Chinese methods of attack.

One of the enduring key features of Confucianism is its reverence for education. Education was perceived to provide the moral fibre an individual required to rule. The suffrage activists accordingly centred their campaign for equal rights on this training for leadership pathway – they could not change their sex, but they could demonstrate the ability to achieve the same markers as men through education. The Chinese political system had been a meritocracy since the Tang dynasty (618–907) when examinations for the selection of public servants were introduced. Educational status equated with moral virtue and moral virtue equated to the right to wield political power.<sup>19</sup> Women were excluded from this meritocracy – female codes of virtue related to chastity and the performance of domestic harmony. On this basis, women were excluded from political participation.

Decades of social chaos, political instability and economic collapse resulting from European imperialist expansion challenged the validity of this accepted practice. The Confucian examination system was disbanded in 1908 and the school system began to include western curricula and methodologies. Radicals and reformers began to explore other models of political and social organisation and several key thinkers, including Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, identified the weak and dependent state of China's women as being central to the weak position of the country as a whole. Women, it was decided, needed to get educated and become useful rather than parasitic.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, changes to China's education system were instituted – women's schools were expanding and girls were winning formal recognition for their learning alongside their brothers. This combination of

radical shifts to education and political structures inevitably challenged the teleology linking male education to male political power. Thus, in China, as a result of this entrenched Confucian link between education and political power, campaigns for equality in educational opportunity were at the forefront of the women's rights movement.

In a cultural context that equates education with the right to exercise political power, the focus on education was of paramount importance within the Chinese women's suffrage campaigns. Throughout the decades of struggle, the leaders of the women's suffrage movement were all highly educated women. In the first wave (1911–13) the suffrage leaders were home-schooled in their early years but often won scholarships to study in Japan. Women in the second wave of activism (1918–28) were more likely to have studied in Chinese primary and secondary schools (sometimes even co-ed schools). This group gained overseas study experience in the USA rather than Japan. The third wave of activists included women with primary, secondary and tertiary training in Chinese institutions. Women's education in China began as a struggle for the establishment of girls' schools beyond the control of the clan or family. The next step was to ensure that girls had access to the same schools and tertiary institutions as boys. The Chinese women's suffrage activists did not challenge the link between education and the right to rule – but they did challenge the notion that only men were able to succeed in gaining an education. Moreover, as we will see below, they were untroubled by the fact that education was primarily an elite privilege and by excluding those without formal educational qualifications, China's vast peasantry would remain dependent on elites for their political voice. Even those women suffrage activists who joined the CCP in 1927 were educated urbanites.

The urgency of achieving the task of 'getting a formal education' received a jolt in 1912 when the women were lobbying for gender equality to be included in the constitution. In a bid to assuage their anger and to salvage some semblance of positive outcomes, Sun Yatsen told the women to focus on promoting women's political and legal knowledge by establishing schools dedicated to this purpose. Once this was achieved and the level of political knowledge of women had been raised then women could return to the negotiating table on a stronger basis. One wing of the women's movement embraced this task with enthusiasm – the Shenzhou Women's Assistance Society. This was the group whose leadership comprised the wives of the male politicians – Song Qingling (1893–1981), Sun Yatsen's wife, and He Miaoling, Wu Tingfang's wife. Sun Yatsen had advised this group as follows: 'In the future women must most certainly have the supreme right to vote. Members of your organisation are talented and knowledgeable. You are in no hurry to acquire suffrage rights but endeavour to unite women, popularise education, study law and politics, promote commerce and industry, and in these ways assist in the nation's progress.'<sup>21</sup> The alternative suffrage group, Tang Qunying's

window-smashing, face-slapping Alliance for Women's Participation in Politics, were less enthusiastic about being fobbed off by the education qualification criteria – arguing that the constitution should thereby specify 'level of education' as a distinct criterion and not 'gender.' This would ensure that women with equal educational qualifications to their brothers would be able to contribute to China's political life.

This points to the second unique feature of the Chinese women's suffrage movement. Unlike in Britain and Germany there was no anxiety about class power in the early Chinese suffrage movement. China's suffragists were Confucian – they accepted that education was a criterion for judging a person's right to rule. That education usually coincided with class status was not expressly debated or problematised. In part this was because under China's system of clan welfare, boys from poor families were often given the opportunity to be educated in clan schools. The moral standing of the clan was premised on the education of its men folk and the possibility that any one of these people could be sufficiently intellectually gifted to pass the examinations provided an incentive to clan elders to ensure that even poor clan members were given the chance to learn. It was widely recognised in China that intellectual ability was not the sole preserve of the rich. However, as the clan school system crumbled in the face of decades of economic and social chaos and then was dismantled in favour of formal western-style schools, even this limited window for social levelling was lost. Western-style schools charged fees and this excluded the poor unless they were furnished with scholarships.

Thus, the women suffrage activists of the first wave did not advocate universal suffrage – they simply wanted gender equality in suffrage. If you were educated, and therefore morally worthy of political engagement, then you should have the right to vote and stand for election regardless of your gender. The absence of an explicit debate about class during the first wave of suffrage activism enabled the Chinese women's suffrage movement to avoid the schisms of the British movement, but had the women been successful, their narrow class vision would have limited the significance of their victory. Thus, the Confucian nature of the first wave of the suffrage movement determined an agenda based on women's educational opportunities while simultaneously excluding discussion of class inequality and elite rule over the masses.

### **Nationalism and suffrage**

Co-mingling with this focus on education (rather than land, wealth or employment) was the centrality of nationalism and national salvation to the early movement. Prior to 1912, the women's suffrage campaign made 'political mileage' out of the ethnic divisions between the Manchu rulers of China and the Han majority – who felt marginalised in a government dominated by these 'foreigners' from the north. Propaganda in support of

the formation of a democratic government was often couched in terms of anti-Manchu racism. Republican nationalism in China was explicitly Han nationalism.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately for the women's suffrage advocates as soon as Han control of China was achieved, the Han patriarchy reasserted itself. The women's enthusiasm for the nationalist project of re-strengthening China, by overthrowing the incompetent and 'foreign' government of the Qing monarchs, would ultimately result in the reaffirmation of Han Confucianism. The nationalism that China's first wave women's suffrage activists mobilised around was unerringly Confucian.

The linkage between Confucianism and Han Nationalism provided a small window of opportunity for the women's suffrage advocates to insinuate themselves into the broader agenda of saving China. The first wave suffrage activists gained support for their cause from men by mobilising the connection between women's improved status and China's improved status, mentioned briefly above. The argument proceeded that if women were improved then China would be strong. Improving women's status *vis à vis* men would not undermine China's social fabric. In fact, it would strengthen it and make it able to cope in the changed circumstances of the modern world. Wendy Larson notes that China's 'early modern intellectuals positioned women as symbolic of China's lack of power, authority, and prestige as a modern nation-state.'<sup>23</sup> The view that China's weakness resulted from the weakness of her women circulated among reformist sections of China's elite during the last years of the 1800s. Prominent reformist critics of the Qing, like Kang Youwei espoused the view that China's women were holding back the nation's progress. The weakness and dependency of Chinese women, symbolised by their physical foot-bound immobility, were like a parasitic weight on the nation as a whole. As Catherine Gipoulon notes within the reformist schema presented by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao: 'Given that the backwardness of China was due to the backwardness of its women, there could be no transformation of China without transforming the female condition.'<sup>24</sup>

This gendered modernisation imperative provided scope for China's suffragists to argue for an improvement in women's public participation partly because it seriously undermined the anti-suffrage cause (which was placed in the untenable position of opposing China's modernisation).<sup>25</sup> One feminist, Hu Binxia, wrote in 1903, 'The current weakened state of China cannot be blamed entirely on the faults of men.' She explained that the weakness and dependency of women prevented them from shouldering their responsibilities as citizens and that this contributed to China's national weakness.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, the fundamental misogyny of Confucian thinking was not necessarily challenged by this rhetoric. Since it blamed women for China's weakness, the utility of this mentality is limited for the advocates of gender equality and the fundamental sameness of men and women.

China's feminists adjusted this misogynist rhetoric to press the case for



liberation – the liberation of women from their position as slaves to men. In this logic, the rebuilding of China's international reputation and national stability depended upon women winning equality with men in political and social spheres. They argued their case in relation to Enlightenment principles of the natural rights of all human beings to equality and liberty. Typical of this sentiment is the 1903 manifesto of the anti-Qing group called the 'Mutual Love Society' (*Gong ai hui*). The Society's constitution declared its aim to be: 'to save the millions of Chinese women, to recover their resolve and their particular rights, to engender a nationalist consciousness among them and to tap the strength of resolve to duty of those women citizens who have committed suicide.'<sup>27</sup> Similarly, in her essay 'A respectful announcement to my sisters' Qiu Jin bemoaned the useless and dependent state of China's women:

Feet bound so tiny, hair combed so shiny; tied, edged, and decorated with flowers and bouquets; trimmed and coiled in silks and satins; smeared with white powders and bright rouges. We spend our lives only knowing how to rely on men – for everything we wear and eat we rely on men.<sup>28</sup>

To help China revive, women had to make themselves useful and independent of men.

In the first two decades of the suffrage struggle, the logic of liberation was overwhelmingly that of strengthening women in order to strengthen China. The limited utility of deploying this misogynist Confucian nationalism became apparent in the rejection of women's claims for equality in 1912. Eventually, China's women's suffrage activists would have to attack the premise that Confucian gender hierarchies were essential to Chinese nationalism for their cause to be successful. Tampering with the edges of Confucianism was insufficient.

Nationalist Confucianism was undermined by the experience of chaos of Han nationalist republican rule. By 1918 it was clear that removing the Manchus from power was not the solution to China's woes. Han Chinese were quite capable of perpetuating further chaos in China without Manchu help. The experience of social dislocation and injustice within the Confucian Han dominated China undermined the credibility of traditional Chinese values. The New Culture Movement's challenge to Confucianism and Han political leadership enabled a new perspective on the links between gender and the right to rule. Women activists at this time were able to invoke comparisons to the mess men had made of China's political scene and the relative power of Europe and America saying that women could surely not do any worse than the current situation. During the chaos of the 1912–18 period China's patient women's suffrage activists gathered ammunition by highlighting the incompetence of Han men. This aided the dismantling of a key tenet of Confucian political thinking –

that women's rise to power would cause chaos and disruption in the kingdom. As the women pointed out, the men had created this chaos on their own, while deliberately excluding women from politics. The century-old teleology between women's political power and social chaos was broken.

Clearly political chaos was not gender linked. A particularly vigorous exchange appeared in the newspaper, *Dagong bao* during the period when the Hunan women were lobbying for gender equality in the provincial Constitution in 1921. Opponents to women's suffrage expressed the view that women should wait until the country's political situation had stabilised before participating in politics.<sup>29</sup> The vehement response from students at a local girls' school ran as follows:

Your suggestion that we should wait until after the national revolution is successfully completed is abhorrent and such promises have been made in the past and have come to naught. We women have waited long enough and we will not wait any longer. We want to participate in the building of this new system.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, they added, opponents' concerns about protecting women from the rough and tumble of politics were also repugnant. 'Your concerns about the safety of women are repulsive given the fact that for so many years women have been trampled on by men. Is being subjected to this sort of hardship your idea of "protection"?'<sup>31</sup> Women had clear evidence of the failure of men to protect their interests and wanted to be able to undertake that role for themselves! The success of the second wave of suffrage activism in winning gains in the provincial parliaments clearly demonstrated the weight of these arguments in the changed social and political context.

During the third wave of activism China's women's suffrage activists were also beneficiaries of nationalist fervour through the extended period of the War against Japan (1937–45). Like Britain's famous suffrage activist, Christabel Pankhurst, China's suffragists became ultra-nationalists. They were not enamoured of the peace movement, rather they joined forces to promote strength and unity against the invading Japanese forces. As ultra-nationalists they demonstrated their patriotic nobility in relation to the on-going cause of national salvation as well as any man. Women expressed their patriotism within the wartime parliament, the PPC and through their engagement with numerous anti-Japanese groups – the National Salvation Association being the most prominent. No doubt this militancy and staunch position of national defence abetted their campaign for quotas for women in parliament. It reaffirmed Chinese women as Chinese in the face of an external Japanese-led threat and presented women with opportunities for public political involvement based on their track record as patriots. Establishing nationalist credentials for the women's suffrage

movement had never been a problem – the difficulties with ‘patriotic suffragism’ emerged when civil war rent asunder the concept of party government. Which of the two warring political entities was the legitimate ruling body?

In 1927, with the purge of the CCP from the GMD, China’s women’s movement was fractured. During the brief period of unity from the 1920s through to 1927 the GMD’s support gave women reason to hope for gender equality once the country was reunited under one government. However, the expulsion of the CCP from the GMD threw this into doubt. The domination of the women’s bureaux by CCP members meant that the women’s wing was decimated by the schism. Nonetheless, the GMD’s continued support for the existence of a women’s bureau suggests that it was reluctant to give the CCP total control over this growing and important constituency. The GMD needed to maintain its credibility on women’s rights simply because women were increasingly important in local, national and global politics. Their continued dictatorship, the failure to hold elections and their overwhelmingly urban orientation ensured that supporting women’s political rights was not a threat to their hold on power. Indeed, in an international perspective, it won them much kudos – especially as Britain (1928) and the USA (1920) had already granted women suffrage rights.

To this end, the GMD announced gender equality in the Tutelage and Draft Constitutions of 1930 and 1936 and continued to engage female GMD members in political leadership positions. For example, prominent woman educator, Dr Wu Yifang became the only woman of the five-member Presidium of the PPC during the War against Japan. She argued repeatedly and convincingly of the importance of guaranteeing women set minimum quotas in any future democratically elected parliament.<sup>32</sup>

For their part, the CCP continued to support the women’s suffrage cause through political structures in its Soviets and Base Area governments. The CCP in the 1930s and early 1940s remained publicly committed to achieving women’s equal political rights with men. However, in private they faced the reality of rural conservatism, as male peasants remained unsupportive of the notion of gender equality. The CCP was not always willing to alienate its core constituency – the male peasantry – for women’s rights. David Goodman’s research on women in CCP base-areas reveals that ‘at the start of 1942 the CCP abandoned any attempt to mobilise women behind appeals to emancipation and gender equality.’<sup>33</sup> At a meeting of senior cadres in the Taihang Base Area, Peng Dehuai ‘warned that raising women’s political consciousness was generally permitted but that cadres should determinedly ensure it takes second place to economic mobilisation, because of both war needs and concerns about potential resentment from male peasants.’<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, like the European communists, China’s communists remained sceptical about the value of women’s suffrage as a political

cause. Prominent female communist martyr, Xiang Jingyu declared this ambiguity in 1923 stating that the suffrage cause reflected only intellectual women's concerns and was merely a diversion for those women who relied on their fathers, husbands and sons for a livelihood by dabbling in 'freedom.'<sup>35</sup>

Despite common current perceptions that the CCP 'gave Chinese women the vote' it was not the case at all.<sup>36</sup> Chinese women had won the vote in GMD controlled areas in 1936, participated in the wartime parliament through the late 1930s and early 1940s and voted and stood for election in 1946. In part, they were able to achieve this because of the GMD's sensitivity over winning propaganda battles – the GMD was not going to let the CCP have complete control of the 'social issues' agenda. Moreover, allowing women's suffrage activists into the political class presented no particular threat to the GMD's continued hold on power because the active women were primarily elite or middle-class urbanites whose outlook mirrored that of the men in the political class.

The CCP–GMD split did affect the functioning of the women's suffrage movement, but it did not completely rupture women's cross-party unity. In the PPC women from both the GMD and the CCP supported each other on issues of women's equal rights with men. Women of all political persuasions supported each other on matters concerning wage equality, child-care provisions, and anti-discrimination legislation. Gender unity on the issue of minimum quotas for women received multi-party support even though the women CCP members may have had grave misgivings about the future of China's political system.<sup>37</sup>

### **Suffrage campaigns and social issues**

The Chinese women's suffrage movement clearly evolved in response to unique and specific cultural and political events. However, it was nonetheless plugged into the international suffrage movement and Chinese women's rights activists attended international meetings and invited American and Japanese speakers to China to raise the profile of the local movement. Despite this awareness of the major trends and concerns in the international movement, China's activists disregarded several issues that were of key concern in Europe, America and Australia–New Zealand.

Of most significance is the absence of the temperance issue in China. In Europe and America, women's suffrage was linked inextricably to the temperance movement – a bid to protect women and children from the abuse caused by alcohol consumption. As Ian Tyrrell has shown, this aspect of the women's suffrage cause was embedded within its Protestant evangelism.<sup>38</sup> There was no necessary link between Chinese women suffrage activists and Christianity. Although some prominent activists were Christian, and had been educated in missionary schools or attended university on missionary scholarships, for the most part, Christianity was a

sideline in the Chinese suffrage movement. Prominent Christian women suffragists included: Liu Wang Liming and Wu Yifang. The former was the chair of China's WCTU but this group was by no means the dominant suffrage association in China, as it was in the USA or New Zealand and Australia. In China, where alcohol abuse was not a problem – the major drug scourge was opium and while this risked depleting the family's finances, as a drug it did not lead directly to domestic violence or sexual abuse as was common with alcohol. Interestingly, opium did not feature prominently in the women's suffrage literature during the decades of the movement's existence.

This did not mean that China's women's suffrage activists were solely concerned with winning the vote. Eliminating the scourge of prostitution featured frequently in their manifestos and speeches, as it did in Europe, America, New Zealand and Australia. In addition, the moral agenda of China's women's suffrage activists was directed at the subordination of women in marriage, the traffic in girls and women and the practice of concubinage. Clearly, the elite women who comprised the suffrage movement felt most threatened by this challenge to their status in the family. In this context, concubines were often demonised – in 1920 the Cantonese Women's Suffrage Alliance nearly split over the decision about whether to include concubines in the movement. Some members were of the opinion that including concubines as members would run counter to the Alliance's platform to develop women's morality. After much heated debate this group lost and those advocating support for all women regardless of marital status won the day.<sup>39</sup> Prostitutes faced the same ambiguous reception by the suffrage activists. They advocated the liberation of women yet regarded the prostitution industry as a social evil that should be eradicated in order to protect women's rights within society. Gender unity never extended to unity with female prostitutes.

The women's suffrage campaigners' advocacy of the dismantling of male sexual privilege – embedded within a double standard of chastity – was a major threat to male politicians during the first wave of suffrage activism. These were the class of men who not only could afford to keep concubines as well as a wife, but they also regularly made visits to brothels as part of their natural male rights. It was not until the social rupture of the decade-long New Culture Movement commencing in 1915 that the men in China's political class began to willingly forgo their previously unchallenged rights to complete extra-marital sexual freedom. This cultural shift occurred in the context of the May Fourth youth movement for freedom in choice of marriage partner mentioned above. Young men and women argued for the right to freedom in choice of marriage partners and the abolition of parentally arranged marriages. The promotion of 'love matches' was anathema to the dilettantish attitude to sex outside marriage that the previous structure promoted. In this new climate, as the decades progressed, the women's suffrage activists' advocacy of the abolition of concubinage, the outlawing of the selling of girls and women and

the prohibition of prostitution was less threatening to an increasingly more liberal male elite.

The international links China's suffrage activists maintained supported but did not dominate the national campaign. China's politically ambitious women had peculiarly Chinese circumstances to contend with and made astute use of the unique historical opportunities afforded them by ruptures to social stability so common in the first half of the twentieth century. They were not particularly inspired by religious or moral fervour – their sense of crusade developed from within a nationalist conception of women's right and duty to participate fully in the political, social and economic life of China.

China's suffrage activists were radical women who presented a radical challenge to centuries-old Confucian patriarchal political structures. They were presented with unique opportunities for activism due to the rupture of Chinese stability by imperialist aggression and internal chaos. Their commitment to China's national survival and strengthening was never in question – nationalism was embedded in almost all aspects of Chinese feminism and certainly in all aspects of China's women's suffrage movement. The belief in democracy and female citizenship provided the impetus for the persistence of the movement despite the myriad setbacks experienced.

## Notes

- 1 An Australian Research Council Discovery Grant made this research possible.
- 2 Louise Edwards, 'From Gender Equality to Gender Difference: Feminist Campaigns for Quotas for Women in Politics,' *Twentieth Century China*, vol. XXIV, 2, 1999, 69–105.
- 3 Chu Wo, 'Nüzi jiating geming shuo,' *Nüzi shijie*, 4, 1904, 2.
- 4 Louise Edwards, 'Narratives of Race and Nation in China: Women's Suffrage in the Early Twentieth Century,' *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 25, 6, 2002, 619–30.
- 5 Lian Shi, 'Ben bao duiyu nüzi guomin juan zhi yanshuo,' *Zhongguo xin nüjie zazhi*, 2, 1907, 23–4. This article appeared in two parts over issues 1 and 2.
- 6 Qiu Jin, 'Mian nü quan,' *Zhongguo nübao*, 2, 1907, 48.
- 7 'Nüjie daibiao Zhang [sic] Qunying deng shang canyiyuan shu,' rpt. in Lin Zongsu's journal *Funü shibao*, 5, 1912, 21–2.
- 8 'Nüzi yaoqiu canzheng quan zhi baodong,' *Dagong bao*, 30 March 1912.
- 9 Sun Yatsen, 'Sun Zhongshan xiansheng fu ben hui shu,' *Shenzhou nübao*, 2, 1912, 1–2.
- 10 'Wanguo nüzi canzheng tongmenghui huizhang dao Hu,' *Minli bao*, 2 September 1912; 'Nü quan da huodong,' *Minli bao*, 5 September 1912; 'Nüzi canzheng hui,' *Minli bao*, 27 September 1912.
- 11 'Huanying nü canzheng huizhang,' *Minli bao*, 10 September 1912.
- 12 The women who dominated this movement include Qiu Jin and Tang Qunying. For more details of their lives and works in relation to women's suffrage see Louise Edwards, 'Women's Suffrage in China: Challenging Scholarly Conventions,' *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 69, 4, 2000, 622. The links with Japan were crucial to these women – both had studied in Japan.

- 13 Wang Zheng, *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- 14 'Yue nǚzi canzheng yundong chenggong,' *Dagong bao*, 20 May 1921; Tan Sheying (ed.), *Zhongguo funü yundong tongshi*, Nanjing: Funü gongming she, 1936. For a copy of the Zhejiang, Hunan and Guangdong Provincial Constitutions of 1921 and the 1923 Sichuan document see Miao Quanji (ed.), *Zhongguo zhixian shi ziliao huibian*, Taipei: Guoshi guan, 1989. Items relating to gender equality are found on pp. 695, 816, 838 and 855.
- 15 L.E. Collins, 'The New Women: A Psychohistorical Study of the Chinese Feminist Movement from 1900 to the Present,' PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1976, p. 620.
- 16 For more detail on these women see the following sources: Liu Wang Liming see Wang Zheng, op. cit., pp. 135–43; Shi Liang see 'Shi Liang tongzhi shengping,' rpt. in *Zhongguo renmin daxue shubao ziliao keshe*, *Funü zuzhi yu shenghuo*, 5, 1985, 42–3; Wu Zhimei see 'Miss Wu Chih-mei,' *Who's Who in China Vol. 3: Fourth Edition*, Hong Kong: Chinese Materials Centre, 1982, p. 225.
- 17 Chou Bih-er, Cal Clark and Janet Clark, *Women in Taiwan Politics*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1990.
- 18 Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997, pp. 76–120.
- 19 This is still evident in the election campaigns of the ROC where candidates list their highest educational qualifications. A large number of candidates across a number of recent elections have doctorates. Kam Louie notes the continuing importance of educational qualifications as an expression of masculine power in *Theorizing Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- 20 For a brief discussion of the contribution made by Liang and Kang to women's rights in China see Wang Zheng, op. cit., pp. 36–8; Wang Shuhuai, 'Kang Youwei dui nǚxing ji hunyin de taidu,' *Jindai Zhongguo funü shi yanjiu*, 2, 1994, 27–49; Zhang Pengyuan, 'Liang Qichao de liangxing guan,' *Jindai Zhongguo funü shi yanjiu*, 2, 1994, 51–64.
- 21 Sun Yatsen, op. cit.
- 22 Louise Edwards, 'Narratives of Race and Nation in China.'
- 23 Wendy Larson, *Women and Writing in Modern China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 26.
- 24 Catherine Gipoulon, 'The emergence of women in politics in China 1898–1927,' *Chinese Studies in History* (Winter), 1989–90, 47–8.
- 25 Louise Edwards, 'Opposition to Women's Suffrage in China: Confronting Modernity in Governance,' in Mechthild Leutner and Nicola Spakowski (eds), *Women in Republican China*, Muenster: LIT, 2004.
- 26 Hu Bin[xia], 'Lun Zhongguo zhi shuairuo nǚzi bu de ci qi zui,' *Jiangsu*, 3, 1903, 156–7.
- 27 'Ribei liuxue nǚxuesheng Gong'ai hui zhangcheng,' *Jiangsu*, 2, 1903, 155.
- 28 Qiu Jin, 'Jinggao yimeimen (jiexuan),' rpt. in Guo Yanli (ed.), *Qiu Jin shiwen xuan*, Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1982, pp. 10–13.
- 29 Cheng Xiluo, 'Bu zuzhang nǚzi canzheng,' *Dagong bao*, 16 May 1921.
- 30 Class Seven of the No. 1 Girls' Normal School, 'Zhi Cheng Xiluo shu,' *Dagong bao*, 18 May 1921.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Wu Yi-fang, 'The People's Political Council,' *China at War*, vol. 6, 5, 1941, 86.
- 33 David S.G. Goodman, 'Revolutionary Women and Women in the Revolution: The Chinese Communist Party and Women in the War of Resistance to Japan, 1937–1945,' *China Quarterly*, 164, 2000, 919.

- 34 Ibid., p. 919. The CCP were also effective in constraining women's political actions within their conception of 'women's work.' For a discussion of the longer-term implications of 'women's work' on women's participation in politics in China see Louise Edwards, 'Constraining Women's Political Work with "Women's-Work": The Chinese Communist Party and Women's Political Participation,' in Anne McLaren (ed.), *Chinese Women: Working and Living*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004, pp. 109–30.
- 35 (Xiang) Jingyu, 'Zhongguo zuijin de funü yundong,' *Qianfeng*, vol. 1, 1, 1923, 58–63.
- 36 Since the 1990s, during the increasing democratisation of China, PRC scholars of women's history have presented the CCP as the leaders of the 1920s 'bourgeois suffrage movement.' For a detailed analysis of the erroneous nature of these claims, see Louise Edwards, 'Coopting the Chinese Women's Suffrage Movement for the Fifth Modernization – Democracy,' *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 26, 3, 2002, 285–308.
- 37 Edwards, 'From Gender Equality to Gender Difference.'
- 38 Ian Tyrell, *Woman's World Woman's Empire: The Women's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880–1930*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.
- 39 'Yue nüjie zhi pai qie huiyi,' *Minguo ribao*, 31 January 1920.

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## 4 Women's suffrage and democracy in Indonesia

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The women's suffrage movement tests notions of democracy and of women as citizens. Whether women have the right to vote alongside men helps define equality of citizenship. Voting itself, however, is meaningless without that essential component of democratic citizenship, the connection of elections to adequate representation and to control of political power. As a nation forged in the twentieth century under colonialism, Indonesia offers examples of the contested notion of women as citizens of a colony and then of a new nation. As a large country (220 million people) where democratization has been slow, disrupted and uncertain, Indonesia poses questions about the significance of women's suffrage. As the biggest Muslim nation in the world, with about 90 per cent of its population claiming Islam as their religion, Indonesia illustrates the influence of Islam on the suffrage movement. In addition, Indonesian history offers its own twists on familiar themes in the chronicles of women's suffrage, such as international influences, the issue of political representation of women as distinct from voting, and problems in identifying the 'date of victory' when women won the vote.

The history of women's suffrage in Indonesia has received very little attention, a point to which I will return at the end of this chapter. Undoubtedly this neglect is related to the dominance of the nationalist movement in Indonesian historiography, the lack of attention to women's issues in Indonesian public life, and the few years of real democracy in the country. Standard works on the political history of Indonesia show no interest in the matter. As a result, very few people are aware of how women came to get the vote, the ways in which women struggled for it, and its historical significance.<sup>1</sup> In the wider history of the women's suffrage movement, the Indonesian case has particular interest, especially since it is now the largest Islamic country in a world where Islamic women are frequently perceived as political victims.

### **The 'date of victory' problem**

In some countries it is a straightforward matter to state that women won the vote on such-and-such a date, but in many it is more complex,

confused by redefinition of national boundaries, the winning of the vote by degrees (see Chapter 1, this volume). It is indeed true to say that in 1945, according to the new constitution, Indonesian women were granted equal citizenship with men, which included the right to vote in the general elections promised by the Republican government. The right was enshrined in the election law drafted in 1948.<sup>2</sup> However, such a bald statement obscures some important facts.

First, the Dutch colonial regime that ruled the Indies until the Japanese Occupation in 1942, granted some Indonesian women the right to representation in elected councils in 1938, and subsequently the right to vote in 1941: thus 'passive' women's suffrage preceded the 'active' form as it had done in the Netherlands itself.<sup>3</sup> The distinction between 'passive' and 'active' suffrage made during this period subsequently took on greater significance in the light of the real gap that often exists for women between the right to vote and actual female representation. The arguments in favour of passive and active suffrage are, however, quite different, the latter being regarded as the true test of democracy, while the allocation of special seats for women to ensure their adequate representation is often considered contrary to notions of equal and democratic citizenship. In the colonial period these issues were first raised and steps were taken down both paths.

Second, since national elections were not held in Indonesia until 1955, women did not exercise their legal right except at lower level elections before then. The preparatory steps for national level elections involved first the transfer of sovereignty in 1949 and then the institutionalization of electoral processes like the creation of an electoral roll, a huge task in such a vast country.<sup>4</sup>

Third, from 1955 until 1999, although elections were held most of the time the right to vote meant little in terms of actual political power of citizens, since governments were basically dictatorial. The re-establishment of free and fair elections in 1999 allowed Indonesians again to enjoy the power associated with democratic suffrage, and for women those elections again raised the problems associated with representation, with the new added twist of debate over female political leadership.

To gain a better understanding of the Indonesian women's suffrage movement one has to examine the colonial origins of that movement, and the continuing struggle after independence to give content to the notion of democratic rights for women. The significance of suffrage for Indonesian women is meaningless unless its connection to nationalism and democratization is appreciated. In Indonesia as in many other countries, too, the deficiencies of elections have been realized as controversies have emerged over female political representation and leadership.

## **Colonialism and suffrage**

The suffrage movement originated in the colonial period and the debate associated with it was largely resolved at that time. One basic but complex question was: Who were citizens and what rights did they have?

There is something contradictory about considering colonial subjects as citizens. Certainly Dutch colonial rulers never claimed to treat all inhabitants of the Indies as citizens with equal rights. It was not just gender that determined civil status, but also race. The Dutch divided the Indies population (61 million in 1930) into three main categories: Europeans (less than half a million), Foreign Orientals (mainly Chinese and Arabs – about 1.2 million) and Natives (more than 59 million). Membership was determined largely by male descent: thus children of a European father could legally claim to be a European so long as their father recognized them as such. Hence most so-called Europeans in the Indies were in fact Eurasian.<sup>5</sup> These groups had different rights and were subject to different laws in some areas, such as marriage. Strictly speaking Europeans were the only real citizens, and as such they enjoyed the most entitlements, and the Chinese suffered some of the greatest discrimination, being treated as aliens even if they were born in the country, as most were by the end of colonial rule.

Without any concept of equal citizenship, not surprisingly there was no democracy in the Indies either. Nevertheless, with the introduction of the so-called Ethical Policy in 1901, the Dutch committed themselves to move towards more liberal political reforms in the Indies. Locher-Scholten has referred to this as an 'ongoing process of the creation of colonial citizenship.'<sup>6</sup> In the first decades of the twentieth century, progress towards a representative parliament was made, and at each step along the way the question of voting and representative rights was debated, with varying results. In 1905 the colonial power introduced representative councils in some municipalities with limited powers and limited constituencies. Only men who paid a high level of income tax and who could read and write might vote, ruling out most non-European males. At the time the literacy rate among men was 11 per cent and among women only 2 per cent.<sup>7</sup> These councils subsequently elected representatives for the national advisory People's Council (Volksraad), which was established in 1918. Only a minority of its members were thus indirectly elected, the rest being appointed by the Governor-General, and the powers of the People's Council were almost non-existent. Representation was skewed towards the Europeans: although they constituted less than 1 per cent of the population of the Indies, they dominated the councils and indigenous Indonesians who made up the vast majority of the population were forced into minority status along with the small groups of 'Foreign Orientals.' After various reforms to establish other local councils and expand the electorate, in the late 1930s elections were held for 32 municipal councils

(mostly in Java) and 76 regency councils in Java that in turn elected members of the People's Council. The eligible electorate was small: for instance, for the two largest municipalities of Batavia and Surabaya, comprising together about one million people, the combined number of voters in 1938 was about 16,000 European citizens, 8,000 Indonesians and 3,000 'Foreign Orientals.'<sup>8</sup>

In the course of extending political rights in the Indies, the question of women's suffrage arose: never whether all women should have the vote but whether it should be granted to women on the same limited basis as to men. Would women too be treated as colonial citizens-in-the-making? The decision to grant women the right to vote was complicated by the number of institutions, in the Netherlands and in the colony, whose agreement was required. Four institutional actors participated in the decision-making: the Dutch government, the Dutch parliament, the colonial government, and the colonial People's Council. During the first four decades of the twentieth century the prevailing views on women's suffrage in these bodies see-sawed backwards and forwards and never coincided, so that one or other actor held up progress towards universal suffrage. The fact that the Indies never had genuinely democratic institutions negated the issue in the eyes of many. Finally, the multiracial nature of Indies society and political rivalry between the races had its own impact on the suffrage struggle.

When the legislation for the People's Council came before the Dutch Parliament in 1916, the question of women's right to be elected (passive suffrage) was raised for the first time. The liberal Minister for Colonies at the time was disposed to grant women passive suffrage in the Indies, but this was not acceptable to two strong Christian parties in the Parliament. Most importantly, Dutchwomen had not yet been granted the vote in the Netherlands: that reform did not occur until 1919. Nor had the issue been canvassed in the Indies where, according to Dutch politicians, there was no demand for it. The Minister was obliged to drop the clause that would have allowed women to be members of the People's Council. In 1919, the year after it opened, the People's Council itself discussed the matter of women's suffrage. Clearly most of its members were in favour. The Government promised to explore the possibilities. By this time opinion had changed in the Netherlands, where the Parliament now contained women. Arguing that it was unfair to deprive women of a right they now possessed in the mother country, in 1925 the Parliament removed from the Indies Administration Law the words that made suffrage exclusively male. From then onwards it was up to the Indies authorities to extend suffrage to women.<sup>9</sup>

When in 1925 the Governor-General introduced a proposal into the People's Council to grant passive and active suffrage to women, however, a majority of People's Council members voted against this reform. In composition the council had become more conservative since 1919. Although

the People's Council had no power to veto government legislation, colonial governments were unwilling to embark on reforms with far-reaching social implications without the support of the only broadly representative body the colony possessed. From 1925 onwards, the Dutch parliament and Ministers for Colonies applied pressure on Governors-General to implement female suffrage, but the colonial authorities preferred to move slowly. First they expanded the Indonesian representation in the People's Council so that in 1931 it reached half the membership of the assembly. Then in 1935, as a gesture in recognition of the need for a 'woman's voice,' the Governor-General appointed a Dutchwoman (Cornelia Razoux Schultz-Metzer) to the People's Council. When the regulations for municipal councils were being revised in 1937, the People's Council had again changed tack and now advocated women's right to vote. The colonial government responded by granting passive suffrage to women, leading to the election of four Indonesian women to those councils in 1938. The last step was taken after the outbreak of war in Europe and the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands in 1940. In September 1941 the colonial government introduced a proposal into the People's Council for active suffrage for European women only. The People's Council voted overwhelmingly in favour of extending this right to all non-European women who fulfilled the (very restrictive) requirements for non-European male voters. On the brink of the outbreak of the Pacific war, in November 1941 the government capitulated and passed legislation to this effect.<sup>10</sup>

This brief overview of the progress of reform illustrates the role of different institutions. It does not, however, give much insight into the forces for and against change, which will be the purpose of the next sections of this chapter.

### **The role of the Dutch suffragists**

The movement for women's suffrage in Indonesia originated with Dutchwomen seeking the vote for themselves. In 1908 a branch of the Dutch Women's Suffrage Association (Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht) was founded in the Dutch East Indies, as an extension of the movement in the Netherlands. The driving force in the early years was Charlotte Jacobs, a pharmacist in Batavia and the sister of the famous Dr Aletta Jacobs, the leader of the Dutch suffragists.<sup>11</sup> In a visit to the Indies in 1912, Aletta Jacobs herself (accompanied by the American leader of the international women's suffrage movement, Carrie Chapman Catt) had inspired the spread of branches in the colony.<sup>12</sup> At first concerned purely to support the Dutch campaign, the Women's Suffrage Association became interested in women's suffrage in the Indies when voting rights were introduced there for municipal councils in Batavia, Semarang and Surabaya. At the time there was apparently only one Indonesian female member among the few hundred male and female members of the Women's

Suffrage Association in the Indies: she was the wife of Dr Abdul Rivai, who later became a People's Council member.<sup>13</sup> The European members were, however, a progressive collection of people. In 1915 the Indies Women's Suffrage Association sent a request to the Queen supporting equality of voting for the municipal councils. Although one branch (Surabaya) wanted only European women to have the vote, the branches in Batavia and Semarang 'thought this would weaken the request' and did not see any reason why 'any educated Native, Chinese and Oriental women might not vote.' The Surabaya branch then agreed to support the request, which as we have seen was rejected in the Netherlands.<sup>14</sup> In 1918 the Indies branches of the Women's Suffrage Association lobbied the new People's Council members about their support for women's suffrage and requested that the Governor-General open the suffrage for municipal councils to women.<sup>15</sup>

When women gained the vote in the Netherlands, the Indies branches decided to continue the campaign for suffrage in the colony, and renamed themselves *Vereeniging Voor Vrouwenkiesrecht in Nederlands Indie* (Association for Women's Suffrage in the Dutch East Indies).<sup>16</sup> They found support for women's suffrage in the 1919 Batavia municipal council and attended the meeting of the People's Council that passed a vote (with only one dissenting voice) in favour of women's suffrage. The Women's Suffrage Association followed this up with a deputation to the Governor-General on the matter.<sup>17</sup>

At this stage the hopes of the Women's Suffrage Association to achieve the vote in the colony as well as the mother country appeared well founded. As we have seen, however, subsequent progress towards reform was stymied in the Indies. As Indonesian nationalist politics became more radical in the 1920s, culminating in the Communist revolts of 1926 and 1927 and the formation of Soekarno's Indonesian Nationalist Party in 1927, opinion in government circles and among European-based parties hardened against any kind of change deemed likely to destabilize Indonesian society and colonial power relations. Colonial governments rebuffed Women's Suffrage Association requests for the vote with the statement that it would not be possible to give the vote to European women while withholding it from Indonesians, and that in Indonesian society there was no desire to give women suffrage.<sup>18</sup>

Their failure at first immobilized the Women's Suffrage Association in the Indies. Later in the 1920s, however, they attempted to take up the challenge to prove that Indonesian women, at least in the educated classes, did indeed want the vote. The Association recruited Indonesian members and tried to contact Indonesian women's organizations to raise awareness of political rights for women. This relationship between Dutch and Indonesian women was a strained one, particularly as the Indonesian women's organizations became identified with the nationalist movement. Leaders of the Women's Suffrage Association had no sympathy with

aspirations for independence in the colony: they wished only to gain voting rights for educated women, including the small minority of Indonesian women who had received a Western education. The attitude of many in the Association was condescending towards less-enlightened native sisters and their increasingly conservative stance mirrored that of the European community in the Indies in the late 1920s and 1930s.<sup>19</sup>

In the 1920s a small number of Indonesian women nevertheless joined the Women's Suffrage Association, attracted by the opportunity to participate in seeking political rights for women at a time when very few Indonesian women's organizations showed any interest in such matters.<sup>20</sup> Two of these determined women who were briefly members of the executive of the Women's Suffrage Association were Roekmini Santoso<sup>21</sup> and Rangkajo Chailan Sjamsoe Datoe Toemenggoeng.<sup>22</sup> The former was one of the sisters of the famous pioneering Indonesian feminist Kartini, and the latter the wife of a Minangkabau civil servant who became a People's Council member. Another well-known Indonesian woman supporter of the movement was Mrs Abdoel Rachman, the wife of a highly-placed Javanese civil servant.<sup>23</sup> The latter two women formed a link between Dutch suffragists and the burgeoning Indonesian women's organizations of the 1920s.<sup>24</sup> The early Indonesian women's organizations, established in the 1910s, sought mainly to advance the social welfare and education of women. Those organizations that entered the political arena in the late 1920s at first identified with the nationalist aspirations of the male-dominated nationalist parties and did not focus on seeking political rights for women under colonial rule.

The Women's Suffrage Association resented their failure to control their Indonesian sisters. When the Indonesian women's movement held its first national conference in 1928, the Association expected to be invited to advise on political strategy; instead they were ignored. Sophie van Overveldt-Biekart, the Association's president at the time, commented that she doubted

whether it is in the interests of Indonesian women to exclude us, when our and their interests meet at so many points and when we, European women, are better prepared for the struggle, and can in many respects provide them with information and support.<sup>25</sup>

In fact, Mrs van Overveldt-Biekart typified the increasingly dominant conservative section of the Women's Suffrage Association, which showed no understanding for the rising Indonesian women's movement.<sup>26</sup> Their influence on that movement was negligible except via a few indomitable members like Mrs Datoe Toemenggoeng. Indeed, at a low point in the organization's morale, in 1934 the Association was about to decide to abandon its usual request to the government to nominate both European and Indonesian women to the People's Council in favour of pressing for a



European appointment only. The move was foiled by Mrs Datoe Toemenggoeng who arrived at the annual general meeting with a group of friends to vote against it.<sup>27</sup>

At critical times, however, two European Women's Suffrage Association members remained true to their pursuit of women's suffrage regardless of race. They were the Dutchwomen appointed by the colonial government to the People's Council, Mrs Razoux Schultz-Metzer, appointed in 1935 and her replacement in 1940, J. Ch. Neuyen-Hakker.<sup>28</sup> Although these women were, or had been, members of the Women's Suffrage Association, neither of their names featured among those put forward by the Association for appointment, implying an official snub to the organization. The Governor-General trusted, and the Association feared, that these women would put other considerations ahead of their commitment to women's suffrage. Indeed, on most occasions they showed few signs of feminist convictions, but on suffrage matters they supported women's rights regardless of race. In 1937 Mrs Razoux Schultz-Metzer introduced a motion, subsequently passed by the People's Council, urging the government to introduce women's suffrage for all racial groups.<sup>29</sup> Similarly in 1941, when the government proposed withholding suffrage from non-European women, Mrs Neuyen-Hakker led the resistance that finally caused official capitulation. In a rousing speech she asked:

Do women here, just as in the most civilized countries in the world, have the right to participate in determining by whom the laws, to which they will be subject, will be made . . . ? No? Then it should also not be granted to Dutch women. Yes? Then it applies for all women who have sufficient education.<sup>30</sup>

It was the amendment moved by Neuyen-Hakker that won People's Council support, and finally government agreement, to active suffrage for educated women in the Indies. The fact that the amendment made it a matter of choice whether eligible women registered themselves as voters also took the sting out of two objections raised by the government: that women did not really want suffrage and that it would be too difficult to identify eligible women voters for registration.

### **The Indonesian women's movement, nationalism and suffrage**

The Indonesian women's organizations that began to emerge in the 1910s were certainly not apolitical, despite their claims: they advocated a number of reforms that required government support, such as greater access to education for girls, and the abolition of forced and child marriage. However, they were slow to take up the suffrage issue, although none openly opposed women's right to vote.

There were a number of reasons for this reluctance. On the part of more conservative organizations, particularly those based on religion, there was clearly an implied view that women were not yet ready for a role in public political life. More than anything, this was a matter of inertia: Indonesian women were not accustomed to playing a part in politics, and had never been encouraged to do so. Politics appeared, by default, to be a man's world in which women did not feel at ease and for which they had no training. There was no objection to women being consulted: in a number of places women landholders, for instance, actually participated in village council elections.<sup>31</sup> But there was no strong tradition of women appearing in public political roles. Ironically, given the sequencing of suffrage expansion followed by the colonial rulers, it was active suffrage rather than passive suffrage that appeared more acceptable in conservative Indonesian circles: what was new was women taking seats in public councils.

Another quite different reason for some Indonesian women not supporting the suffrage campaign was nationalism. Those who espoused nationalist views most strongly often regarded suffrage as a diversion. What was the point, they implied, in seeking to vote for or be elected to municipal or higher councils when those bodies had little power in a colonial setting, and when the most important goal was national independence? Those who followed the so-called 'non-cooperating' path of Indonesian nationalism by rejecting involvement in colonial institutions took no part in the suffrage debate. Strikingly, the most outspoken Indonesian feminist in the Indies, Soewarni Pringgodigdo, spurned the suffrage movement because she identified with Soekarno's Indonesian Nationalist Party that was outlawed by the Dutch in the 1930s for its radical anti-colonial stance.<sup>32</sup> Even the more moderate women leaders of the Indonesian Women's Congress (the federation of a number of pro-nationalist women's organizations) felt obliged to warn against competition between men and women once the principle of women's suffrage was conceded by the government in 1941: they reiterated the need for unity between the sexes in the struggle for equal human rights and national rights.<sup>33</sup>

During the 1930s, as the Indonesian women's movement grew in sophistication and experience, more members began to campaign for women's political rights. Towards the end of the decade national conferences of the movement were for the first time demanding women's right to vote. Rivalry with the Europeans served to prod nationalists forward at this stage: it was galling for a European woman, and not an Indonesian, to be appointed to the People's Council in 1935, and even more for the government to contemplate giving the vote to European but not Indonesian women in 1941. After the appointment of Mrs Razoux Schultz-Metzer in 1935, a number of women's organizations and Indonesian newspapers proceeded to propose to the government names of suitable Indonesian

women who should be appointed in future: these names included Mrs Datoe Toemenggoeng and the lawyer Maria Ulfah Santoso.<sup>34</sup> In 1938, for the first time, the national conference of Indonesian women's organizations passed a motion on women's suffrage: after a speech by Mrs Datoe Toemenggoeng on the matter, the conference cautiously recommended that member organizations 'carry on work and education concerning suffrage as freely as possible' if their organizations permitted political activities.<sup>35</sup>

Four women, all prominent in the women's movement, were elected to municipal councils in and after 1938 under the new system of passive suffrage for women.<sup>36</sup> In August 1939, when the government failed to respond to requests to appoint an Indonesian woman to the People's Council, 45 women's organizations held a public protest meeting after being refused permission to hold a demonstration on the matter. Stressing the injustice of European but not Indonesian women having a voice in the People's Council, the meeting concluded with a resolution urging the government to nominate an Indonesian woman for the next People's Council term.<sup>37</sup>

In the end, the paths of the nationalist movement, the Indonesian women's movement and the Women's Suffrage Association converged in pressuring the colonial government to grant limited voting rights to Indonesian women – rights that were equal to those of Indonesian men of the day. The nationalist movement in 1939 embarked upon a campaign for an Indonesian parliament, a democratically elected body to replace the People's Council. This was the price they demanded for cooperating with the colonial government in the face of what they argued was the approaching threat of war. Gapi (acronym for Gaboengan Politik Indonesia or Indonesian Political Coalition), the coalition of Indonesian organizations that united to press for democratic reforms, committed itself to universal suffrage as part of its campaign, which was supported by a large number of Indonesian women's organizations.<sup>38</sup> The national conference of women's organizations in July 1941 supported in principle Gapi's action for a parliament.<sup>39</sup>

Up until the formation of Gapi, male nationalists had not mounted a concerted campaign for women's suffrage, and even within the coalition the demand was incorporated in a more general one for universal suffrage: after all, most Indonesian men were also deprived of the vote in the Indies. At the public meeting held to launch Gapi in 1939, it is significant that despite the presence of women in the audience, there were no female speakers and no mention of votes for women, merely the need for a parliament elected by 'the people.'<sup>40</sup> Within the People's Council, however, nationalist members had from time to time supported the idea of suffrage for women. In 1918, for instance, Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo spoke out strongly for the right of women to representation in the assembly.<sup>41</sup> More typically, however, male nationalists just did not address the issue, or when

asked, indicated weak support or lack of opposition to granting their womenfolk the right to vote.<sup>42</sup>

Nothing changed until the outbreak of war in Europe. Although at first the Netherlands hoped to remain neutral in the war, it was invaded by Germany in 1940 and the Dutch government and sovereign were forced to flee to Britain. The Dutch East Indies was on a war footing with Germany even before it was invaded by Japan in January 1942. The colonial authorities began to respond more sympathetically although still very cautiously to demands for political reform in the colonies, leading to their final capitulation to demands for active suffrage for a limited group of educated women.

Although the right was an empty one, since no elections were held before the Japanese Occupation, it was an important step forward, breaking the ice for universal suffrage. The significant fact was that by this time there was virtually no opposition left to women's suffrage. Only three members of the People's Council voted against it – a Dutch Catholic who had consistently opposed women of any race being permitted to vote, and a Chinese representative and a conservative Sumatran who considered the right conflicted with the customs of their ethnic groups. They were harmless remnants of conservatism: the tide had turned in favour of women's political rights.

### **Other sources of support and opposition to women's suffrage in the Indies**

As we have seen, the main consistent source of support for women's suffrage in the Indies was the Women's Suffrage Association, joined in the final years by some Indonesian women. Indonesian women's and men's organizations of a nationalist orientation came to the issue late and endorsed women's suffrage only in the late 1930s. It goes without saying, given the low level of literacy in the Indies, that interest in suffrage was limited to a small group of mainly urban dwellers.

Among the Indonesians, it is interesting to consider the impact of regional differences among the suffrage protagonists and opponents. In the few areas where educational levels were relatively high, especially among women, support for women's rights tended to be higher. The prime example is the Minahasa, in northern Sulawesi, where Christian missions had spread Western education very effectively. Male Minahasans were outspoken in their defence of women's suffrage.<sup>43</sup> Conversely, in regions where there was less contact with Western ideas and a more patriarchal culture, such as Bali, women's suffrage was either ignored or was opposed. In such regions, too, there were no local councils for which election was an issue: most such councils were found in Java, where the bulk of the population was concentrated.

Part of the colonial government's argument against women's suffrage

was that it was contrary to Indonesian custom and religion in some regions. An example proffered was Minangkabau in West Sumatra, where the regional council rejected a proposal in 1940 by three of its members to allow passive suffrage for women. Reasons put forward by those who narrowly defeated the motion were that the presence of women in a public council violated Islamic principles and customary practice. Islamic attitudes will be discussed further below. The fact that the government appointed most of the (very conservative) members of the council obviously influenced the outcome of the vote. A number of prominent Minangkabau men and women immediately rejected the notion that their region prohibited women from taking a public role.<sup>44</sup> It is indeed ironic that Minangkabau, well-known for its matrilineal inheritance system, for its strong women's organizations and for its outspoken women like Mrs Datoe Toemenggoeng, should be represented as an impediment to women's suffrage, although it is true that women had no formal role in customary public institutions. Again, we encounter the problem of the distinction between 'voting' and 'representation': the former is sometimes more easily accepted than the latter.

Some European men consistently supported women's right to vote. A number of them were part of the Theosophy movement, another international link in the suffrage movement apart from the Women's Suffrage Association. Bringing together people of both sexes from different religious backgrounds, as in British India, Theosophy was fashionable in the early twentieth century among some members of the Indies elite (both European and non-European). It propounded a vague spirituality with which many could identify and also espoused some progressive social and cultural attitudes. Prominent male Theosophists were members of the Women's Suffrage Association and spoke in favour of female suffrage in the People's Council.<sup>45</sup> It was not just 'progressive' men who came to support women's suffrage, however: it also found defenders in some of the most conservative quarters, such as in the Patriotic Club, whose members perhaps hoped women would have a moderating political influence. In 1940 this party chose its own woman member of the People's Council – Mrs Goudswaard-Knipscheer, replacing one of its male representatives. Just as European women in the Women's Suffrage Association found no contradiction between colonialism and feminism, neither did Patriotic Club members think civil rights for women were incompatible with imperialism. What was important was that both groups considered only a small minority of well-to-do Western educated women worthy of suffrage.

Some of the strongest opponents of women's suffrage were to be found among the minority Arab and Chinese groups in the Indies. Their organizations never displayed any support for the movement, which was roundly criticized by some leaders of these groups within the People's Council. It was rare for any Chinese, but especially a Chinese woman, to defend the notion of votes for women.<sup>46</sup> By the time of the last debates of 1941,

however, the Arab and Chinese representatives were divided on the issue. Rivalry between the racial groups meant it was difficult for any group to reject suffrage once other groups had accepted it for their women.

Among the opponents of women's suffrage in the Indies it is remarkable how few opposed it as a matter of principle. Once women had won the vote in the Netherlands, only a few diehards maintained the old arguments about women's inferiority or unsuitability for public political life. Those who rejected moves to extend the vote to women mainly did so on the grounds of expediency. As we have seen, the Dutch colonial authorities often stated that they had no objection to giving European women the vote but refrained from doing so merely because it would appear inequitable towards Indonesian women, whom they deemed not yet 'ready' for suffrage. This refrain about 'readiness' was taken up by a number of People's Council members too: thus it was just a matter of time before the reform would finally be granted.

Indies government personnel could see no value in adopting a reform that might make them enemies in the Indonesian camp, would take trouble to implement (particularly to establish which women fulfilled eligibility requirements), and would not win significant new support. Locher-Scholten points out that the colonial government was wary after the rise of radical nationalism and the fierce Islamic hostility it encountered when it proposed a cautious reform of marriage laws in 1937.<sup>47</sup> The general tenor of the remarks of government spokesmen in the People's Council was that the government was unwilling to make the effort to grant educated women the vote if the move still met with any opposition.

### **Democracy and women's citizenship**

As already mentioned, the Indonesian nationalist movement came to embrace universal suffrage before the Second World War as part of its campaign for democracy in the colony. For many this was a last-ditch effort to wring reforms out of an intransigent colonial ruler. Some of the more Western-educated nationalists were, however, genuinely committed to democracy. The nexus between nationalism and democracy was revived after the Japanese occupation of 1942–5 when the newly proclaimed Indonesian Republic tried to gain acceptance in the international arena. Although Soekarno, a nationalist leader with no commitment to democracy, was president at the time, his close association with the Japanese during the war forced him to take a back seat to more democratic-minded leaders like Sjahrir. They were in a better position to negotiate with the victorious allies and to deal with the United Nations, which came to take a dominant role in the efforts to stop the Dutch re-establishing their colony in the Indies.

For Indonesian women the ascendancy of the democrats was extremely important. It meant that the new government was committed as a matter

of course to universal suffrage and elections for democratic institutions. Even though national elections were not held until after the armed struggle for independence ended with the transfer of sovereignty in 1949, the interim cabinets that governed the Republic began to put in place preparations for a liberal democratic regime. A genuinely free and fair election was finally held in 1955, marking the climax of constitutional democracy in Indonesia in the 1950s.

Although for the vast majority of women, the constitution promised equal citizenship with men, the situation was not so clear for the minority groups of Eurasian and Chinese descent in the new nation.<sup>48</sup> Many Eurasians chose to leave the country and go to the Netherlands to settle rather than lose their privileged position in the Indies. For the Chinese, discriminatory measures had deprived many of Indonesian citizenship for decades, and even when they gained legal recognition the discrimination often persisted, diminishing the significance of voting rights for either sex.

The 1955 election was the first occasion on which Indonesian women were able to make use of the right to vote. What did it yield for them? First, they were keen to take advantage of suffrage. Although it was not compulsory to vote, most women, like men, did so. Second, in terms of representation women did not fare well. A women's party was founded on the basis that women had a distinct political voice, but none of its candidates was successful and most parties and voters apparently did not accept that parliament needed a large number of women to represent their interests. In addition, of course, there were practical problems such as women's inexperience with party politics and the reluctance of men to yield power to them. For whatever reasons, only a small proportion of women candidates stood for election and an even smaller number were elected. The new parliament after 1955 contained few women and cabinets included none. In a global perspective this was not surprising: few women were elected anywhere in the democratic world at that time and certainly not in new democracies. But women's organizations were active lobbyists and hoped to gain reforms for which they had campaigned for years.

Unfortunately the cabinet instability that plagued Indonesia meant that controversial reforms desired by women's organizations had little hope of being passed. Governments consisted of coalitions that made trade-offs to survive. One of these trade-offs was the matter of marriage law reform that was dear to the hearts of Indonesian women. For decades the women's movement lobbied for the codification of marriage law incorporating more equal rights for women in marriage and a minimum age for marriage. It never got off the ground during the years of parliamentary democracy in Indonesia in the 1950s. However, other reforms in favour of gender equality were passed, such as equal pay for men and women civil servants, and governments fulfilled promises to raise women's levels of literacy.<sup>49</sup>

The era of parliamentary democracy ended in 1958 when President Soekarno dissolved the parliament and declared the introduction of 'Guided Democracy,' a thinly disguised form of dictatorship. During the subsequent period no elections were held and parliament had no power. Women along with men had virtually no political rights. With the introduction of the New Order regime under President Suharto, who had *de facto* control from 1966 onwards, the political situation was more complex. Suharto, originally an army general, was no more committed to democracy than his predecessor had been, but initially he was dependent on Western foreign aid. The trappings of democracy were established, with elections being held every five years for parliament, which in turn, through the People's Consultative Assembly, elected the president.<sup>50</sup> Thus Indonesian women, along with their menfolk, resumed voting on a regular basis from 1971 onwards. Yet elections were meaningless. The government strictly controlled political parties and election procedures and established its own electoral machine, Golkar, which always gained about two-thirds of the vote. Every five years the People's Consultative Assembly obediently elected Suharto as president, unopposed. Parliament (the People's Representative Council) was quiescent for most of the New Order: it initiated no legislation and never rejected the bills placed before it by the government.

Under these conditions women's right to vote was as meaningless as men's. This did not mean, however, that the government always ignored the women's wishes. Although the New Order regime was notorious for imposing a gender ideology that justified the domestication of women, it was successful in 1974 in pushing through parliament an act for marriage reform – such as most women's organizations had wanted for decades. The act increased women's rights in marriage. So long as the government was in favour (and in this case Suharto was prepared to take on the wrath of Islamic organizations), the New Order regime could through its dictatorial methods institute reforms that democratic governments had been unwilling and unable to initiate for the sake of women. Moreover, within its corporatist view of politics, the New Order accepted the right of women as a 'functional group' to special representation in parliament, although of course it handpicked those representatives who tended to be middle-class urban women.<sup>51</sup>

Suharto's regime finally fell in 1998, brought down by the Asian financial crisis that undermined the economic development so important to its legitimacy. Fully-fledged democracy returned to Indonesia with its first free elections for decades being held in 1999. Women like men revelled in their new political rights. There was a big voter turn-out and many new parties participated. Women were not well placed, however, to take full advantage of opportunities. Despite massively increased literacy rates as a result of the New Order, and foreign aid to help inform women about the true meaning of elections, women did not have enough time and



resources to prepare for the election.<sup>52</sup> As in 1955, there were relatively few women candidates and the percentage of women in the new parliament, at only 8 per cent, represented a dramatic decline compared with the composition of the previous body.<sup>53</sup>

However, the big issue of women's political rights that took everyone by surprise was the question of whether the country should have a female president. Megawati Soekarnoputri led the PDI-P party, which gained the largest number of votes in the 1999 election. Representing the legacy of her late father, Soekarno, she was immensely popular in areas where support for secular nationalism was strong, such as among less devout Muslims and in non-Islamic areas like Hindu Bali. Any government emerging from the 1999 elections was going to have to rely on a coalition within the parliament, and intense negotiations took place to establish the new government and determine the president, who was to be elected by the People's Consultative Assembly.<sup>54</sup> Since under the prevailing 1945 constitution the president has wide powers, this was a critical matter. The largest parties based on Islam formed a united front to oppose the selection of Megawati as president in favour of someone more identified with the Islamic cause. Some Islamic leaders maintained that their rejection of Megawati was based on Islamic teachings that a woman should not lead men. For months there was ongoing controversy with verses of the Koran and Hadith (Islamic traditions) being bandied about by both sides, and many pointed out that the constitution precluded such discrimination against women.<sup>55</sup> Finally when the vote was held in the People's Consultative Assembly in October 1999, the strongly Islamic leader Abdurrachman Wahid was elected president with Megawati as his vice-president. Many politicians' opposition to Megawati was purely tactical. This was revealed two years later when the parliament had lost patience with Wahid's erratic leadership. In 2001 Islamic leaders declared they had dropped their objections to a female leader and the People's Consultative Assembly ousted Wahid from office. It then voted Megawati into power, giving Indonesia its first female president.

Such was the irony of the situation that, as women's organizations glumly pointed out, Megawati was actually likely to prove less interested in women's issues than Wahid.<sup>56</sup> The latter had, for instance, appointed the first truly feminist (and Islamic!) minister for women's affairs – she insisted that her department be renamed Ministry for Women's Empowerment.<sup>57</sup> However, the appointment of a woman president is clearly of immense symbolic significance for women's political rights, and can be seen as a victorious result of the suffrage movement.

### **Islam and women's role in politics**

The foregoing history of Indonesian women's struggle for suffrage makes clear the relatively subdued role that religion, and specifically Islam, has

played. There were very few cases of open confrontation between Islamic leaders and protagonists of women's political rights. Indeed, it surprised most people to see the resurgence of Islamic assertiveness about women in politics at the time of the debate about the possibility that Megawati might become president of Indonesia.

How do we explain the relatively low profile of Islam in this matter, in the largest Islamic country in the world? First we should recognize that in Indonesia, Islam has very rarely interfered with the public role of women. This fact, considered 'abnormal' in accounts of Islam based on Arab and West Asian experiences, may in part account for the remarkable absence of Indonesia in the wider literature on women and Islam.<sup>58</sup> Since pre-Islamic times, women have been free to work in the fields and in the markets, to participate in festivals alongside men, and even, in exceptional cases, to take on roles as political leaders. With the rise of modern political movements in Indonesia since the early twentieth century, there was no objection to women becoming members, although they very rarely played a prominent role. Indeed, most political parties wanted to recruit women to swell their ranks, to support policies such as *swadeshi* (buying national products in preference to colonial imports), and to raise children as loyal Indonesians.

Overtly Islamic parties and organizations did, however, have some difficulty in overcoming religious and sometimes customary objections to women playing a public political role. They preferred women to join separate wings or auxiliary bodies, and during the colonial period some Islamic organizations erected curtains at public meetings to separate men from women in the audience. Sometimes they objected to women speaking before male audiences.<sup>59</sup> In the light of the objection by the Minangkabau council to women's passive suffrage, as noted above, it is interesting to observe an earlier dispute between women and men when the congresses of the Islamic organization, Muhammadiyah, and its women's wing, Aisiyah, were held in Minangkabau in 1930. The organization's report of the conference noted that women attended from all over the region. Finding that they were excluded from public meetings held by Muhammadiyah, they 'forced their way into the Congress Hall.' They were also annoyed to find that the Aisiyah leader was not permitted to speak at the men's meeting because 'it was not the custom there.'<sup>60</sup> Obviously there was no unanimity among Muslims about women's public role.

As the support of Islamic organizations for the nationalist movement grew, and their practices of gender discrimination were challenged by secular nationalists, they quietly modified their behaviour. It was exceptional to hear Islamic leaders object to women taking on public roles; more commonly they just remained silent on the matter of women's political rights. Women members of Islamic organizations took no part in the struggle for women to gain the vote during the colonial period – but neither did they oppose it. Within Gapi, in 1939 Islamic parties joined with secular ones in supporting the idea of universal suffrage, thus

committing themselves to women's right to vote without spelling it out in ways that might prove embarrassing. This gave tacit permission for at least one leader of the women's wing of an Islamic party (S. Yati of *Pergerakan Isteri PSII*) to pronounce that 'In civic matters, surely we women have a right to a say like other citizens in the running of the country, but up to now we have had no satisfaction in this respect, rather only disappointment.'<sup>61</sup> After independence tacit acceptance of universal suffrage continued, for equally pragmatic reasons, such as the desire to win international support. Although some Islamic groups placed themselves outside the consensus by campaigning for an Islamic state where the rights of women might have been reduced (although that was never spelled out), they were marginalized and swept away by the post-war democratic tide.

In subsequent years nothing further was heard from the Islamic movement in Indonesia about women's political rights, until the next wave of democratization in the 1990s. As we have seen, by then the issue was not whether women should be allowed to vote or to be represented in parliament, rights which were not contested, but whether they should be allowed to take the position of president.

Regardless of the reasons for the Islamic case against Megawati, it did represent a challenge to women's political leadership and as such was strongly opposed by many women's organizations. The battle now seems to have been won. There is no noticeable opposition on religious grounds to women taking any public political roles. Women have taken seats in parliament and in the highest positions in the land. The question of numbers is a different matter: as we have seen, women are still in a small minority. This in itself may be in part influenced by Islamic ideology, which in practice discourages women from entering publicly prominent positions. It is significant, however, that Indonesian Muslims avoid taking overtly antagonistic stances on such matters: there is no legitimacy within Indonesian Islam for opposing women's equal political rights as citizens. The 'Megawati debate' seems to have been a flash in the pan, motivated more by political expediency than religious principle.

As was frequently pointed out during that controversy, other Islamic countries (Turkey, Bangladesh and Pakistan) had already elected woman leaders. And despite their symbolic importance, their accession to power did not in the short term signify any change in the position of women, which was admittedly far lower in those countries than in Indonesia. It may take a long time for women to build up their numbers in the Indonesian parliament and make their mark politically. This realization spurred some women's organizations to push for quotas for women in the parliament.<sup>62</sup> In early 2003, the parliament compromised by legislating that among the slate of candidates put forward by political parties, at least one third should be women.<sup>63</sup> So the fight for women's political rights continues. The right to vote was only one of the changes necessary to empower women.

## **The place of women's suffrage in Indonesian historiography**

Apart from the remarkable early history of Indonesia by A.K. Pringgodigdo<sup>64</sup> (who was, significantly, the husband of one of the foremost Indonesian feminists, Soewarni Pringgodigdo), and the excellent new book by Australian historian Jean Gelman Taylor,<sup>65</sup> most histories of Indonesia, inside or outside the country, have not mentioned the women's movement at all or give it no more than a passing reference.<sup>66</sup> This reflects the widespread lack of awareness of women in history writing until very recently. But more surprisingly, even books devoted to the history of the Indonesian women's movement have given little or no attention to the suffrage issue and do not mention that the colonial government granted some women the right to be elected in 1938 and to vote in 1941 – or even that the new Republic introduced universal suffrage.<sup>67</sup> The pioneering work by Vreede-de Stuers<sup>68</sup> is an exception, meticulously (albeit briefly) tracing the women's suffrage thread. The fact that the author was a Dutchwoman is significant. Under the New Order, official publications on the history of the women's movement downplayed the significance of women gaining the vote, often by just neglecting to mention the issue.<sup>69</sup>

There are a number of possible reasons for the neglect of the women's suffrage issue. One is the universal lack of interest in women in general history-writing until feminism began to exert its influence since the 1990s.<sup>70</sup> A further explanation is the hegemony of nationalism in Indonesian historiography. Even when women's activities are reported, they are seen as politically significant only in relation to the nationalist movement. Thus women's struggle for political rights is considered of little interest by comparison with the struggle for national independence. Moreover, the fact that histories of the nationalist movement are in turn dominated by the activities of the 'non-co-operators,' the radical wing that refused any dealings with the colonial power, has meant that consideration of elections for any representative bodies during the colonial period was judged uninteresting or even reprehensible.

The timing of the gaining of the vote also ensured it was eclipsed. Because (limited) women's suffrage was granted in 1941, it was immediately overshadowed by the imminent Japanese occupation of the country that rendered all such issues obsolete, at least for the duration of the war. Similarly, although universal suffrage was proclaimed by the new Republic in 1945, this event is overwhelmed by the narrative of the armed struggle for independence (1945–9), often referred to as the Revolution, during which no nation-wide elections were held.

It is scarcely surprising that histories published during the New Order period in Indonesia showed no interest in women's right to vote. This was a period of radical official depoliticization, when the whole notion of

political rights was downplayed and democracy was only acceptable in an 'Indonesianized' form that rendered it a hollow mockery.

Women's suffrage is also marked as a feminist issue. In Indonesia feminism has frequently been rendered illegitimate through its association with the West. Indonesian women leaders have often distanced themselves from feminism, characterizing it as anti-man and divisively non-nationalist. Because the suffrage issue was first raised in the Indies by European feminists, the matter is especially fraught. For this reason, even those who I would regard as strongly feminist in their orientation, like Sujatin Kartowijono,<sup>71</sup> downgrade or even ignore the suffrage campaign in their accounts. As the anonymous author of an officially published history of the Indonesian women's movement put it in 1968, 'Indonesian feminism differs from Western feminism. The latter was mainly aimed at opposing the efforts of the men, for the sake of the progress of the women, such as the suffragettes movement in England, demanding rights for women.' Whereas in Indonesia, the book claimed, the women's movement became identified with the nationalist movement to create national unity and resist Dutch and Japanese colonialism.<sup>72</sup> In 1989 one of Suharto's Ministers for Women's Affairs,<sup>73</sup> Sulasikin Murpratomo stated,

The women's struggle . . . 'represents a struggle together with men to gain, defend and realize independence.' In doing so, unlike the emancipation of women in the West, Indonesian women 'have never behaved in a confrontative way towards men but rather have prioritized cooperation.'<sup>74</sup>

Tracing the history of the vote for women involves understanding the connection between Indonesian women and Dutch suffragism. In Indonesian historiography, however, it has been virtually taboo to acknowledge any influence by colonialists on Indonesian thinking: to do so in relation to women would be particularly dangerous since women are expected to be the purveyors and protectors of national tradition. Only foreigners discuss such matters.<sup>75</sup> In Indonesian accounts, the ideas of the women's movement are presented as entirely indigenous.

It is only since the 1990s that more detailed attention has been given to the history of women's suffrage in Indonesia, and so far that writing has been by Western women. With the revival of democracy in Indonesia and the increasing interest there in women's political rights, it is conceivable that Indonesians will rediscover the significance of this aspect of their history.

## Notes

- 1 J.G. Taylor, 'Images of the Indonesian Revolution,' in J. Drakard and J. Legge (eds), *Indonesian Independence Fifty Years On*, Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1996, p. 19.

- 2 Ibid., p. 18.
- 3 For a brief history of Dutch feminism, including the suffrage campaign, see H.P. Hogeweg-de Hart, 'The History of the Women's Movement in the Netherlands,' *The Netherlands Journal of Sociology*, 14, 1978, 19–40.
- 4 Indonesian women first used their vote during local elections from 1946 onwards in various parts of the archipelago under both Republican and Dutch control. See R. Cribb, 'Democratic Self Determination and the Indonesian Revolution,' in J. Drakard and J. Legge (eds), *Indonesian Independence Fifty Years On*, Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1996.
- 5 It was also possible for people of other races to become 'naturalized' Europeans by applying for that status and meeting certain criteria such as literacy qualifications. Few in the Indies chose this option.
- 6 E. Locher-Scholten, *Women and the Colonial State: Essays on Gender and Modernity in the Netherlands Indies, 1900–1942*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000.
- 7 *Volkstelling 1930*, Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1936.
- 8 Visman Commissie, *Verslag van de Commissie tot Bestudeering van Staatsrechtelijke Hervormingen*, Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1940.
- 9 Locher-Scholten, op. cit.; C. Berger, 'Een Vrouwenstemmetje ... De Vrouwenkiesrechtstrijd in Nederlands-Indie 1908–1941,' MA dissertation, Utrecht University, 1990; S. Blackburn, 'Winning the Vote for Women in Indonesia,' *Australian Feminist Studies*, 14, 1999, 207–18.
- 10 Locher-Scholten, op. cit.
- 11 I. de Wilde, 'Minder opvallend dan haar "meer roerige zuster": over de apothekeres Charlotte Jacobs (1847–1916),' *Groniek: Historisch Tijdschrift*, 25, 1992, 59–74.
- 12 S. Blackburn, 'Western Feminists Observe Asian Women: An Example from the Dutch East Indies,' in J.G. Taylor (ed.), *Women Creating Indonesia: The First Fifty Years*, Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1997.
- 13 *Jaarverslag over 1915 van de Afdeling Batavia van de Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht*, Batavia, 1915.
- 14 Ibid., pp. 9–11.
- 15 *Jaarverslag over 1918 van de Afdeling Batavia van de Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht*, Batavia, 1918.
- 16 For the sake of simplicity, I will continue to refer to this organization as the Women's Suffrage Association, although it changed its name several times during the colonial period.
- 17 *Jaarverslag over 1919 van de Afdeling Batavia van de Vereeniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht*, Batavia, 1919.
- 18 Locher-Scholten, op. cit.
- 19 Ibid.; S. Blackburn, 'Political Relations Among Women in a Multiracial City: Colonial Batavia in the Twentieth Century,' in K. Grijns and P. Nas (eds), *Jakarta-Batavia: Socio-cultural Essays*, Leiden: KITLV Press, 2000, pp. 175–98.
- 20 Two Indonesian women's organizations are recorded as having supported proposals for women's suffrage before the 1920s. They were Poetri Mardika in Batavia and PIKAT in Menado: significantly these were towns with a high concentration of educated Indonesian women. See *Jaarverslag over 1918*, op. cit.
- 21 R.A. Roekmini (1880–1951) married M. Santoso in 1919 and lived with him in Kudus, rather far removed from the centres of political activity.
- 22 She was the wife of L. Datoe Toemenggoeng of Agam, a civil servant in Batavia and a People's Council member for the PPBB (Indonesian Civil Servants' Association) from 1935 to 1939. Editor of the women's magazine *Pedoman Isteri* she was also the leader of the women's section of a Minangkabau organization,

- Persatoean Minangkabau Djakarta, and of Persatoean Isteri Pegawai Bestuur (Association of Wives of Civil Servants). She appears to have joined the Women's Suffrage Association in 1931. In 1938 she stood, unsuccessfully, as candidate for the Batavia municipal elections.
- 23 Born in 1885 of a Javanese aristocratic family, R.A.A. Abdoel Rachman (also written Abdoerrachman) was married to the Regent of Mr Cornelis, which became incorporated in the city of Batavia in 1935. A founding member of one of the first women's organizations, Poetri Mardika, she also led the women's social welfare organization Kamadjengan Istri and chaired the Kartini school association in Batavia. When she left the Indies to accompany her husband on a trip to Europe she left the Women's Suffrage Association and seems never to have rejoined it, devoting her time rather to the Indonesian women's movement. See C. Vreede-de Stuers, *The Indonesian Woman: Struggles and Achievements*, The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1960, p. 179; S. Marijam, *De Indonesische Vrouw 1898-1948*, Batavia: Departement van Opvoeding, Kunsten en Wetenschappen, 1948, p. 19.
  - 24 Blackburn, 'Political Relations,' op. cit.
  - 25 S. van Overveldt-Biekart, 'Aan de Leden,' *Maandblad van de Vereniging voor Vrouwenkiesrecht in Nederlandsch-Indie*, vol. 3, 2, 1928, 3.
  - 26 Mrs van Overveldt-Biekart had been a staunch supporter of women's suffrage since her youth in the Netherlands, but in the Indies she was a member of the Patriotic Club and married to the Dutch administrator of a large Javanese sugar factory.
  - 27 'Algemeene Jaarvergadering gehouden te Batavia-C. op 23 Maart "34,"' *Maandblad van de Vereniging voor Vrouwenrechten in Nederlandsch-Indie*, vol. 8, 7, 1934, 1-6.
  - 28 Trained in the Netherlands as a teacher, Mrs Razoux Shultz-Metzer had married an Eurasian and founded the women's wing of the Indo-Europeesche Vereniging (Eurasian League), concerned mainly with social welfare activities. For biographical notes on this woman see E. Locher-Scholten, 'Cornelia Hendrika Metzger,' *Biografisch Woordenboek van Nederland* website, [www.konbib.nl/infolev/ingrp/wekbet/bwn/lemmata/metzer.html](http://www.konbib.nl/infolev/ingrp/wekbet/bwn/lemmata/metzer.html), 1997 (accessed 20 August 2001). Mevr. Neuyen-Hakker was a doctor, who had been working voluntarily in Batavia in a hospital for Indonesians after falling victim to the government decree of 1935 dismissing married women government doctors. See Blackburn, 'Political Relations,' op. cit.
  - 29 Locher-Scholten, *Women and the Colonial State*, op. cit., p. 169.
  - 30 *Volksraad Handelingen*, Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1941, p. 1215.
  - 31 A number of Indonesian People's Council members made this point forcefully in 1919. See Vreede-de Stuers, op. cit., pp. 95-6.
  - 32 Born in 1910, Soewarni Pringgodigdo founded at the age of only twenty the radical women's organization Isteri Sedar. In the 1950s she was a member of parliament. For biographical notes see *ibid.*, p. 181. It is noteworthy that Isteri Sedar voted against the 1939 resolution of the Indonesian women's protest meeting (mentioned below) for women to be appointed to the People's Council. 'Djakarta Protestmeeting,' *Isteri Indonesia*, vol. 3, 9, 1939, 7.
  - 33 'Kongres Perempoean IV di Semarang pada tg. 25-28 Djoeli 1941,' *Isteri Indonesia*, vol. 5, 8, 1941, 5-8.
  - 34 For example, *Overzicht van den Inlandsche en Maleisch-Chineesche Pers. IPO*, Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1938, pp. 649, 860. Born in 1911, M.U. Santoso (later Soebadio after her second marriage) was very active in the women's movement throughout her life, in the colonial period particularly on issues of marriage law reform. She was a founder of the women's organization Isteri Indonesia. In

- 1946 she was appointed by Sjahrir to the Republican cabinet, the first woman to hold that office. For her strong defence of women's suffrage during the colonial period, see M.U. Santoso, 'Hak Pilih Bagi Perempuan,' *Isteri Indonesia*, vol. 5, 9, 1941, 1-3; M.U. Santoso, 'Soal Hak Pilih,' *Isteri Indonesia*, vol. 5, 8, 1941, 1-3.
- 35 Panitia Peringatan, *Buku Peringatan 30 Tahun Kesatuan Pergerakan Wanita Indonesia*, 22 Des. 1928-22 Des. 1958, Djakarta: Pertjetakan Negara, 1958, pp. 31-3.
- 36 They were Mrs Soedirman in Surabaya, Mrs Soenario Mangoenpoespito in Semarang, Mrs Emma Poeradiredja in Bandung, and Mrs Sri Oemiati in Ceribon.
- 37 'Djakarta Protestmeeting,' op. cit.
- 38 *Overzicht*, op. cit., 1939, pp. 883-99.
- 39 'Kongres Perempuan,' op. cit.
- 40 Gaboengan Politik Indonesia, *Parlement Indonesia!* Djakarta: Gaboengan Politik Indonesia, 1939.
- 41 *Volksraad Handelingen*, Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1918, pp. 125-6.
- 42 For example, *Jaarverslag over 1918*, op. cit., pp. 7-10.
- 43 Examples include Dr Sam Ratulangi and A.L. Waworuntu.
- 44 D. Boerhan, 'Dewan Alam Minangkabau menolak kaoem Iboe?,' *Isteri Indonesia*, vol. 5, 3, 1941, 4-6.
- 45 H.A.O. de Tollenaere, *The Politics of Divine Wisdom: Theosophy and Labour, National and Women's Movements in Indonesia and South Asia, 1875-1947*, Nijmegen: Uitgeverij Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen, 1995.
- 46 An exception was the Chinese woman doctor, Thung Sin Nio, who had been educated in the Netherlands. See Y.-W.F. Chan, 'Feminist and Scholar: The Student Days of Dr Thung Sin Nio in the Netherlands,' paper presented at Colloquium on The Chinese Diaspora in Europe, Paris, 20-21 January 1995.
- 47 Locher-Scholten, *Women and the Colonial State*, op. cit., pp. 175-6.
- 48 S. Blackburn, 'Women and Citizenship in Indonesia,' *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 34, 1999, 189-204.
- 49 Vreede-de Stuers, op. cit.
- 50 The People's Consultative Assembly consisted of the mostly elected People's Representative Council or parliament of 500 members, plus 500 more, largely appointed by the President.
- 51 S.A. Douglas, 'Women in Indonesian Politics: The Myth of Functional Interest,' in S.A. Chipp and J.J. Green (eds), *Asian Women in Transition*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980.
- 52 S. Blackburn, 'The 1999 General Election in Indonesia: Where Were the Women?' in S. Blackburn (ed.), *Pemilu: The 1999 Indonesian Election*, Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1999.
- 53 *International Parliamentary Union website*, [www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2147.htm](http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2147.htm), 2000 (accessed 18 January 2002).
- 54 In 1998 the composition of both the People's Consultative Assembly and the People's Representative Council were reformed to bring them more into line with democratic principles. By 1999 the majority of the former consisted of elected members.
- 55 For examples of the publications marking the debate, see G. Arivia (ed.), *Jurnal Perempuan Diskusi Radio: Suara Demokrasi, Budaya Dan Hak-Hak Perempuan*, Jakarta: Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan, 1999; H.A. Jaiz, *Polemik Presiden Wanita*, Jakarta: Pustaka Al-Kautsar, 1998; N. Hidayah, *Kontroversi Presiden Wanita*, Jakarta: Pt Pabelan Jayakarta, 1998.



- 56 See for example comment of P. Widinugraheni, 'Women Activists Face Challenge with President Megawati,' *Jakarta Post*, 11 August 2001.
- 57 The new Minister was Kofifah Indar Parawansa, a young but experienced politician from Wahid's party. Some of her unorthodox ideas can be gauged from one of her speeches: K.I. Parawansa, 'Institution Building: An Effort to Improve Indonesian Women's Role and Status,' in K. Robinson and S. Bessell (eds), *Women in Indonesia: Gender, Equity and Development*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002. The change of departmental name was even more significant than appears in English translation. The word used for women under the Wahid regime was *perempuan*, replacing the old word *wanita* that had come into official usage since the Second World War. The latter term has overtones of gentility (something akin to 'lady' in English) while *perempuan* has earthier and even radical overtones.
- 58 For example D. Kandiyoti (ed.), *Women, Islam and the State*, Houndmills: Macmillan, 1991; V. Moghadam (ed.), *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies*, London: Zed Books, 1994.
- 59 Objections to mixed audiences and speakers occurred particularly within one of the largest Islamic organizations, Muhammadiyah, before independence and caused friction with some in the women's wing. See Hoofd-Comite Congres Moehammadijah, *Peringatan Congres Moehammadijah Minangkabau ke XIX*, Djokjakarta: Moehammadijah, 1930, pp. 5–17, 31. Soekarno and his wife left a Muhammadiyah meeting in disgust when they followed their custom of erecting a curtain between men and women in the audience. See *Overzicht*, op. cit., 1939, p. 98. For a concise statement of Islamic objections to women in public life by an Indonesian religious teacher, see the booklet by A. Hassan, *Perempoean Islam di Dewan dan Podium*, Bangil: Persatoean Islam, 1941.
- 60 Hoofd-Comite, op. cit.
- 61 Majelis Departement Pergerakan Isteri PSII, *Boekoe Peringatan 'Pergerakan Isteri PSII' 1918–1940*, Jakarta: Pergerakan Isteri PSII, 1940, p. 82. There appears to have been considerable tension between the women's wing and the male leadership of PSII, with the former wanting more independence than the latter would permit. S. Yati herself seems to have come into conflict with PSII leadership, leading to her demotion amid resentment from other women.
- 62 Even Islamic women leaders took up this demand. See, for instance, the interview with Hj Aisyah Hamid Baidlowi, president of Muslimat NU. 'Dekonstruksi peran untuk dan oleh perempuan,' *Kompas*, 31 March 2000. Megawati has rejected the imposition of quotas.
- 63 LOK, 'Panjang, perjuangan kuota perempuan di Parlemen,' *Kompas*, 10 March 2003.
- 64 A.K. Pringgodigdo, *Sedjarah Pergerakan Rakjat Indonesia*, Djakarta: Pustaka Rakjat, 1950.
- 65 J.G. Taylor, *Indonesia: Peoples and Histories*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.
- 66 See for example, M.C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, London: Macmillan, 1981; G. Moedjanto, *Indonesia Abad ke-20. I. Dari Kebangkitan Nasional sampai Linggadjati*, Yogyakarta: Penerbit Kanisius, 1988; S. Kartodirdjo, *Pengantar Sejarah Indonesia Baru: Sejarah Pergerakan Nasional. II: Dari Kolonialisme Sampai Nasionalisme*, Jakarta: Gramedia, 1990.
- 67 Marijam, op. cit.; S. Kartowijono, *Perkembangan Pergerakan Wanita Indonesia*, Jakarta: Yayasan Idayu, 1977; S. Suryochondro, *Potret Pergerakan Wanita di Indonesia*, Jakarta: Rajawali, 1984; G.A. Ohorella et al., *Peranan Wanita Indonesia dalam Masa Pergerakan Nasional*, Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional, Proyek Inventarisasi dan Dokumentasi Sejarah Nasional, 1992.

- 68 Vreede-de Stuers, op. cit.
- 69 For example, Department of Information, Republic of Indonesia, *The Indonesian Women's Movement: A Chronological Survey of the Women's Movement in Indonesia*, Jakarta: Department of Information, Republic of Indonesia, 1968; A.S. Murpratomo, 'Perjuangan Wanita Indonesia dari Masa ke Masa,' *Ilmu dan Budaya*, 1989, vol. 11, pp. 446–61.
- 70 A recent work on Indonesian historiography by Indonesia's eminent historian, S. Kartodirdjo makes no mention of gender. S. Kartodirdjo, *Indonesian Historiography*, Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2001.
- 71 Kartowijono, op. cit.
- 72 Department of Information, op. cit., p. 10.
- 73 This position was created in 1978, during the International Women's Decade.
- 74 Murpratomo, op. cit., p. 446.
- 75 For example, Blackburn, 'Winning the vote,' op. cit.; Blackburn, 'Political relations,' op. cit.; E. Locher-Scholten, 'The Colonial Heritage of Human Rights in Indonesia: The Case of the Vote for Women, 1916–41,' *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 30, 1999, 54–73; Locher-Scholten, *Women and the Colonial State*, op. cit.; Vreede-de Stuers, op. cit.; F. van Winckelmann, "'Uit gevoel van hoffelijkheid voor de Nederlandse vrouw": de Volksraad over vrouwenkiesrecht in de jaren dertig,' in E. Captain, M. Hellevoort and M. van der Klein (eds), *Vertrouwd en Vreemd*, Hilversum: Verloren, 2000, pp. 207–16.

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## 5 Women's suffrage in Việt Nam

*Micheline R. Lessard*

On 2 September 1945, the Democratic Republic of Việt Nam (DRV) came into being.<sup>1</sup> Proclaimed by Ho Chi Minh in Ba Đình Square, Việt Nam's independence marked a significant turn in Vietnamese women's history. The DRV's first constitution, drafted and enacted in the months immediately following independence, declared that:

Vietnam is a democratic republic. All state powers belong to the people, irrespective of race, sex, property, class and religion. (Article 1)  
All Vietnamese citizens have equal rights in all fields: political, economic and cultural. (Article 6)

All Vietnamese citizens are equal before the law and are able to participate in the government and in national construction, depending on their own abilities and virtues. (Article 7)

Women are equal in rights to men in all fields. (Article 9)

The electoral regime shall be universal suffrage. Voting shall be free, direct and secret. (Article 17)

All Vietnamese citizens aged 18 and above, irrespective of sex, have the right to vote, except insane persons and those deprived of civil rights.

Candidates for election must be persons who have the right to vote, and are at least 21 years of age, and know how to read and write the national language. (Article 18)<sup>2</sup>

With this new constitution, women in the DRV were granted, for the first time in their history, equal rights and full participation in their nation's political process. Vietnamese women's right to vote, however, was not the culmination of a suffrage movement per se. Instead, women's suffrage was linked to a more general women's rights movement – a movement that developed in the early decades of the twentieth century and which was an integral part of Việt Nam's protracted resistance to French colonial rule. Therefore, this chapter traces the development of this Vietnamese women's rights movement, its evolution, and its culmination in the enfranchisement of Vietnamese women as stipulated in the constitutions

and the Civil Code of Việt Nam – documents intended to guarantee, at least from a legal standpoint, Vietnamese women's rights with respect to suffrage, and political representation and participation. Furthermore, this chapter suggests that the emancipation of the Vietnamese woman, including her right to vote and to fully participate in her nation's governance, was indeed revolutionary though often (and perhaps still) couched in Confucian terms.

### **Representations of Vietnamese women**

So far, the study of Việt Nam's past, from the earliest historical records through to the present, has produced two principal, and seemingly contradictory, representations of Vietnamese women's roles within society: that of the patriotic heroine who took up arms to fight Việt Nam's invaders, and that of the Vietnamese woman and mother bound by Confucian concepts such as the Three Obediences and the Four Virtues (*tam tông tứ đức*).<sup>3</sup> The reality is of course much more complex. Not every Vietnamese woman was free or possessed the ability to forego her home life in order to serve her country. Within the home, some Vietnamese women were able, despite a number of cultural constraints, to wield a measure of influence. Nevertheless, these representations did serve to propagate an image of the ideal Vietnamese woman, a woman capable of protecting both her home and her nation. As such, they were an important element in the women's rights movement in Việt Nam, and subsequently in women's rights to participate in state affairs.

Việt Nam's historical memory includes a pantheon of heroic Vietnamese women willing to sacrifice their lives for the sake of national independence. All scholars of Việt Nam are familiar with the legendary exploits of the Trung Sisters (Trung Trac and Trung Nhi), who from 40 to 43 C.E., organized battles against Chinese invaders. The Trung Sisters are an intrinsic part of the Vietnamese historical memory and of Vietnamese popular culture, not only because of their successful (albeit brief) resistance against Chinese forces, but also because, according to this memory, they made the ultimate sacrifice and chose suicide over capitulation. Another very familiar heroine is Bà Triệu, or Thiệu Tri Trinh, who at the very young age of twenty, retreated to the mountains in order to raise an army to fight the Chinese. When her army was defeated in 248 C.E., like the Trung Sisters, Bà Triệu apparently opted for suicide by jumping into a river rather than surrendering.

To this day, in Việt Nam there are celebrations commemorating these women's heroic and patriotic deeds. It is not unusual for Vietnamese families to own and display statuettes of these women warriors. Throughout Việt Nam's cities there are streets named after them and monuments dedicated to their memory. Over the centuries other women have joined this illustrious group of heroines. According to historians Mai Thi Tu and

Lê Thi Nham Tuyêt, Ngo Quyên's 938 C.E. victory over Chinese forces 'was due to a stratagem of Duong Thi Nhu Ngoc,' his wife.<sup>4</sup> In 1257, in response to a foreign threat, Tran Thi Dung, 'wife of commander-in-chief Tran Thu Do,' organized the evacuation of members of Việt Nam's imperial family. She also armed members of the general population and led them to the front.<sup>5</sup> In the eighteenth century, Bui Thi Xuân was credited with fending off attackers from Siam.

All of these women represent an important aspect of the Vietnamese historical memory. As such, they play a number of important roles in the formation of the Vietnamese national identity. First, they clearly highlight Việt Nam's many struggles against foreign invaders consistently more powerful, at least in number, than their own armies. They illustrate, through the saying 'even the women must fight,' that Việt Nam's success lay in mobilizing *all* of the nation's resources; that women's sacrifices were far greater, and their successes all the more heroic. Second, the pantheon of Vietnamese heroines is often used to separate Việt Nam, politically, culturally and socially, from its long-time Chinese occupiers. The status given these women is often used to demonstrate that one thousand years of Chinese rule may have resulted in substantial cultural borrowing, but that this adoption of Chinese social, philosophical, political and cultural norms was not wholesale. Vietnamese historians have often made the point that a significant difference between Chinese and Vietnamese Confucianism has been the higher status (albeit slightly) of Vietnamese women compared with their Chinese counterparts. The Vietnamese at least more readily acknowledged the exploits of its heroic women.

Third, the role of these heroines in Việt Nam's history is didactic. These women serve, in a true Confucian sense, as moral exemplars of patriotic duty. Even prior to the advent of the popular press, the stories of the Trung Sisters, Bà Triệu and others were spread orally through songs and poems. As Lê Thi Nham Tuyêt has noted:

Thanks to the presentation of this oral and music tradition, the image of heroines in the war for national salvation such as the Trung Sisters, Lady Triệu, and Bui Thi Xuân . . . have always been fresh in the minds of the Vietnamese.<sup>6</sup>

The image of the Vietnamese heroine would be used frequently during the French colonial period (1885–1954) and during the period of American intervention (1955–75) in order to rally all Vietnamese to the cause of Vietnamese independence and reunification.

In contrast to this image of the Vietnamese heroine who takes up arms against foreign invaders is that of the Vietnamese woman confronting the strictures of traditional Confucian ideology. While the application of Confucian constraints on women tended to differ depending on a woman's socio-economic background, by and large Vietnamese women were bound

by gender-based rules. Throughout her life a Vietnamese woman owed obedience to her father, then to her husband (remaining unmarried was virtually unthinkable), and should she become a widow, to her eldest son. More often than not marriages were arranged by her parents during a girl's adolescence or even childhood. Polygamy was allowed, particularly if a woman was unable to produce a male heir. Women had no access to divorce, but men could, under certain conditions, repudiate their wives. Marriages were exogamous, a bride living with her husband's family, often at the mercy of her mother-in-law. With few exceptions, Vietnamese girls received little, if any, formal education. However, a Vietnamese woman's rules of conduct were passed down through a number of didactic texts. Among the educated Vietnamese elite, the *Nu Tac*, the code of good conduct for Vietnamese girls and women, could be found in nearly every home.<sup>7</sup> Again, according to Mai Thi Tu and Lê Thi Nham Tuyêt:

A profusion of didactic works was published from the fifteenth century on. Many of them, such as *Education in the Family* (fifteenth century), had whole chapters devoted to women. Specialized works with such titles as *Education of Girls*, *Duties of Women and Girls*, educational songs and poems took pains to illustrate the rules of the Four Virtues and the Three Obediences, using the form and content most suitable for each social stratum, from the common people to the aristocracy.<sup>8</sup>

However, in contrast to Chinese women Vietnamese women never had to bind their feet, and moreover, according to legal codes, were allowed to inherit land and property. In a study on the status of women in traditional Việt Nam, Ta Van Tai suggested that the Lê Code, written during the Lê Dynasty (1428–1788), though modelled on the Chinese Tang Code, took into account the Vietnamese custom of allowing women to inherit property.<sup>9</sup> According to historian Ngo Vinh Long: 'Article 389 of the Lê Code says that when parents grow old and want to divide their properties among their children, the head of the clan should see to it that the properties, however large or small, are divided equally among all the children.'<sup>10</sup> While Vietnamese women could own and inherit property, they were nonetheless relegated, for the most part, to the domestic realm.<sup>11</sup>

Recently, scholars Mariam Darce Frenier and Kimberly Mancini have suggested that in the thirteenth century, there existed a women's mandarin and that a few Vietnamese women had managed to become teachers and to educate a number of Vietnamese girls who later were able to serve in the Imperial Court.<sup>12</sup> The degree of the women's influence, the length of their mandarin and the nature of its functions remain unclear. Nonetheless, it is safe to say that some Vietnamese women did desire to participate in the nation's affairs, but that this participation was usually restricted to times of national crisis. With few exceptions, formal



education was reserved for men, scholars at the imperial court were men, and village councils of notables were composed of men.<sup>13</sup>

Vietnamese men and women alike perceive no dissonance between the apparently contradictory images of the Vietnamese woman in her dual warrior and domestic roles. In fact, the heroism of women such as the Trung Sisters and Bà Triệu lies not only in their military or martial exploits, but also in their moral conduct. They were virtuous and filial. They were first and foremost wives and daughters, who when necessary, were willing to take up arms to protect the hearth, be it the Vietnamese family or the Vietnamese nation (the family writ large). In fact, the Trung Sisters' rebellion followed the death, at the hands of the Chinese, of Trung Trac's husband. Duong Thi Nhu Ngoc and Tran Thi Dung were assisting their husbands and not acting as individuals with long-term military or political aspirations. The women afforded the label of heroine were those who had defended the country the way a mother would defend her home and her children. As Mary Ann Tétreault has noted: 'The cultural symbols of the nurturing mother and the heroine who leads the people to expel the foreign invader are both interpreted as models of female autonomy.'<sup>14</sup> As such, it is unsurprising that a number of monuments honouring women fighters in Việt Nam depict women as defiant in the face of the enemy while carrying children on their shoulders.

### **Women, education and the anti-colonial struggle**

For the Vietnamese, the presence of the French military in Cochinchina<sup>15</sup> in 1862, and its advance north, which resulted in Việt Nam's colonization in 1885, was but another in a long list of foreign invasions. The resistance to French rule was immediate. In spite of its promises to modernize and 'civilize' Vietnamese society, French colonialism seemed to worsen, at least for a while, the lot of women in Vietnamese society. French colonial rule transformed the Vietnamese economy from one of subsistence to one of surplus production, emphasizing exports. Historian Ngo Vinh Long argues that the result of French colonial 'economic policies and monopolies,' was the destruction of 'virtually every traditional craft and occupation of women.'<sup>16</sup> Gradually, women found themselves unable to find agricultural work. Without means, they became more and more dependent upon their husbands' incomes.<sup>17</sup> The economic situation, precarious before French colonialism, grew all the more dismal for most Vietnamese, men and women alike. A considerable number of Vietnamese women were obliged to seek work outside the traditional domestic and family realm. Many worked as domestics and servants in French colonists' homes. The most disenfranchised worked as 'wives, mistresses, and prostitutes to French soldiers and administrators.'<sup>18</sup> In order to survive, some families were forced to sell the labour of their daughters. French colonial policies therefore placed Vietnamese women under a double burden – Confucian

moral restrictions and colonial rule. Under such circumstances, Vietnamese women were increasingly unable to remain 'generals of the interior.'

Historian David Marr has determined that French colonial rule prompted Vietnamese intellectuals to question the validity and the usefulness of certain Vietnamese traditions, including attitudes towards women.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, in the early decades of the twentieth century we see the emergence of a women's rights movement in Việt Nam, a movement that in time would timidly call for women's suffrage, but that, for the most part, had more general goals: raising the status of women within the context of the Vietnamese family. Initially there were few, if any, challenges to the Confucian notion that woman's place was within the domestic realm. In time, Vietnamese intellectuals considered the women's rights movement essential to successfully mobilize Vietnamese women for the larger, more immediate, anti-colonial resistance movement. This campaign would allow women, once again, to leave the domestic sphere in order to defend the nation.

As was their historical legacy, Vietnamese women responded quickly to oppose French colonialism, participating in the earliest armed uprisings against French troops. As early as 1883, the *Association of the People Devoted to the Just Cause* mounted a resistance campaign. Their president was apparently a woman named Nhu who, in the tradition of the Trung Sisters, had replaced her husband following his assassination.<sup>20</sup> Other armed insurrections, such as that led by Phan Dinh Phung and Than Thuât in 1886 and the Yen Thê uprising of 1892, benefited from the participation of women.<sup>21</sup>

In spite of women's early response to foreign invasion, Vietnamese intellectuals embarked on a lengthy discussion concerning the role of women in the anti-French struggle. One of the first Vietnamese intellectuals to call Vietnamese women to join the revolution was Phan Boi Chau – he recognized women's potential as allies in the armed struggle against France. Chau saw no contradictions between the two prevalent images of Vietnamese women. He called upon women to become 'mothers of the nation' and join the fight, thereby explicitly linking both representations of Vietnamese women.<sup>22</sup> In 1907 he declared that Vietnamese women were one of the 'ten essential groups' in Vietnamese society.<sup>23</sup> He stated that 'with regard to education, that of the military and women is the most important.'<sup>24</sup> Phan Boi Chau, although rather paternalistic, did justify the education of Vietnamese women by linking enhanced women's status to increased participation in national affairs:

Women will become good mothers, loving wives, knowledgeable in literature and poetry, well trained in commerce; they are also expert educators of our children and efficient assistants to our soldiers. A good mother will have nice children; she will be a virtuous wife to a

perfect husband. Moreover in politics women will possess many rights. Only with education will one know how to neglect one's private interests in order to take care of the public good, so as to make one's country accumulate its riches and increase its strength. A country that has no patriotic women is bound to be subjugated by another country. In the modernization scheme of countries women's education plays an important role. Textbooks to be used by women must be selected from among the best. The schools that are reserved for women should have better teachers. In all matters related to finance, in industrial schools, in convalescence homes, in trading outlets, in banks, in post offices, in buses, in trains, it is best to employ well-educated women. They will strive to serve the country as much as men. Their pride and dignity will be equal to men's. The government and society will join in their praises. Every woman in the country should of course endeavour to become a good mother, a virtuous wife, but also a talented woman. They will leave their names in stone stellae and in bronze statues. Women shall not be inferior to men. That's the aim of women's education.<sup>25</sup>

Later, to emphasize his point and to legitimize women's participation in the revolution, Phan Boi Chau would write and disseminate a play depicting the life of the Trung Sisters.

One of Phan Boi Chau's contemporaries, Phan Chu Trinh, also encouraged Vietnamese women to play a larger role in Việt Nam's national life. Like his proposed reforms for Vietnamese society in general (the establishment of a constitutional monarchy, the abolition of the mandarin and modernization), Trinh sought to change education to enhance Vietnamese competitiveness with Europeans. He advocated education for Vietnamese of all classes, including women. Phan Chu Trinh was a frequent lecturer at the Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc (Tonkin Free School),<sup>26</sup> a school that during its brief existence between 1907 and 1908, allowed women to teach and encouraged women to 'attend lectures on history, culture and politics.'<sup>27</sup>

In its initial stage, therefore, the women's rights movement in Việt Nam emphasized girls' and young women's education. As Hué Tam Ho Tai has noted, debates centred around the notion that women gain 'emancipation first from ignorance.'<sup>28</sup> By the 1910s, the formal education of Vietnamese girls and young women had become the preoccupation of many: French colonial officials; anti-colonialists; and urban bourgeois Vietnamese women. A number of French colonial officials had long maintained that Vietnamese women represented a serious obstacle to their rule in Việt Nam:

It is therefore in our interest to give the young *annamite* girl a Western education, because it is the female element that ordinarily

opposes our culture; it is the female element that is most attached to traditional customs. Once girls' education is developed, this opposition will disappear and through the education of indigenous women it will finally be possible to instil in children, from infancy, certain principles which they would otherwise have learned much later, once in school.<sup>29</sup>

Comparing Vietnam and China, one French author wrote: 'It is not the same with the annamite people, where women lead men, and today lead them against us.'<sup>30</sup> Such optimism regarding French education's potential to transform Vietnamese women, and thereby Vietnamese society as a whole, was widespread. As one French woman stated in 1914: 'winning over the man is winning over the individual, winning over the woman is winning over the race.'<sup>31</sup> French colonial education of Vietnamese girls and young women was formalized in 1907 with the opening of the first Vietnamese girls' school in Nam Dinh.<sup>32</sup> Then in 1910 in Tonkin alone, the *Résident Supérieur* announced the opening and the creation of no less than four girls' schools (in Ha Dong, Son Tay, Haiphong and Hanoi).<sup>33</sup> Of course, the Vietnamese themselves shared the French belief in a Vietnamese woman's ability to influence her family. Mai Thi Tu and Lê Thi Nham Tuyêt argue that as cultural guardians and propagandists, Vietnamese women had been more than successful:

For centuries neither efforts at assimilation, from the first-century Han to the fourteenth-century Ming, nor various social upheavals were able to efface the national characteristics of the Vietnamese people, and the credit for this belongs in great part to Vietnamese mothers, who have taken to heart the task of bringing up their children according to the traditions of their people.<sup>34</sup>

While French colonial officials hoped that schooling would transform young Vietnamese women into promoters of French culture, Vietnamese men of various political leanings also clamoured for the creation of girls' schools. Their motives were as different as their political aspirations. Conservative men such as Pham Quynh applauded and supported French educational policies in Việt Nam, including the effort to educate girls. An avowed Francophile, Quynh nonetheless took great pains to ensure that the education of girls also included the retention of a number of Vietnamese moral values such as the Four Virtues. Pham Quynh hoped that the education of Vietnamese girls would make them better wives and daughters, and produce young women able to engage their husbands, their fathers and their brothers in pleasant conversation. Quynh wanted Vietnamese girls to emulate French bourgeois women provided they preserved their special 'Asian' qualities. He stressed that there did indeed exist a distinct Asian female ideal, and that this ideal needed to be

preserved, for modern education was uplifting for Vietnamese women but also potentially corrupting:

The annamite woman, so stable, usually, whose disciplined activities dictate the rhythm of family, social, even economic life, the woman who, in this country, in many respects is superior to man, the woman herself is affected by this general, moral degeneration.<sup>35</sup>

He used his publication *Nam Phong* to elaborate at great length his theories on proper Vietnamese women's behaviour. He also published a number of articles praising virtuous, filial and pious women such as the Trung Sisters and Bà Triệu.

During the 1920s there was a growing radicalization of the anti-colonial movement. This resulted in part from the failure of Vietnamese moderates to persuade the French to grant greater Vietnamese representation and participation in the nation's affairs and to increase Vietnamese access to education. By the 1920s a small but significant group of Vietnamese intellectuals had obtained a French education (in Việt Nam, in France or both), and as a consequence had been exposed to a range of philosophies and political ideologies. Cities such as Hanoi and Saigon witnessed the development of a Vietnamese bourgeoisie. A number of girls' schools (including normal schools) had been created and from within the urban Vietnamese elite that patronized these new establishments emerged young Vietnamese women who now challenged Confucian tenets regarding gender roles. In the cities some educated Vietnamese women abandoned traditional customs. They no longer lacquered their teeth. Some abandoned traditional clothing for Western fashions, and cut their hair short. They asked for better work opportunities and conditions and for the right to participate in the colonial government. Many participated in anti-colonial activities by joining secret political organizations, by organizing and participating in school and labour strikes, and by distributing political tracts or pamphlets. This activism and enthusiasm for new and foreign ideas, such as freedom, equality and individualism, was concentrated among the daughters of the small, wealthy Vietnamese elite, but new methods of mass communication facilitated the spread of this challenge to the old Confucian order to a broader audience.

### **Mass media and the woman question**

Vietnamese demands for greater access to education and political participation were expressed clearly in Việt Nam's flourishing mass press. Vietnamese conservatives, moderates and radicals alike established newspapers, periodicals and presses in order to disseminate their ideas or to debate issues. The first periodical created specifically for Vietnamese women was *Nu Gioi Chung* (Women's Bell), published in Saigon in 1918

and edited by Suong Nguyet Anh. Given the strict censorship of newspapers imposed by French colonial authorities, the periodical intended to avoid political debate and to focus instead on women's domestic tasks and on women's proper behaviour. The newspaper's authors and editors were particularly interested in women's education. Suong Nguyet Anh herself maintained that women's equality with men could not precede an adequate education.<sup>36</sup> The newspaper would break its promise to not engage in political debate for the woman question was inherently highly political since women's emancipation was tied to national liberation. Still, the paper fell short of overt calls for women's suffrage.

Another newspaper, even more influential, was *Phu Nu Tan Van* (Women's News), founded in Saigon in 1929. The newspaper explored and debated the 'woman question' in Việt Nam. Its writers, editors and readers called for improvements in women's rights regarding marriage, divorce and polygamy. They debated the means and justification for improvements in women's economic situation. At times, they also called for women's overt participation in political affairs.<sup>37</sup> The opinions in *Phu Nu Tan Van* were diverse. From the outset, the periodical regularly featured columns on women in 'national affairs,' and women and education. It also printed the thoughts of numerous Vietnamese personalities (men) with respect to Vietnamese women's roles in society. Founded and run by educated, bourgeois Vietnamese women, the newspaper gradually grew critical of women of 'their own class.'<sup>38</sup> They were following the general pattern of radicalization of the Vietnamese resistance movement. A change in the newspaper's editorial staff had taken place in 1933, reflecting this shift in political discourse. The newspaper's editors then chastised the bourgeois feminists who tended to 'separate themselves from their sisters and act in an individualistic, selfish manner.'<sup>39</sup>

Other women's newspapers were established following the success of *Phu Nu Tan Van*. The *Phu Nu Thoi Dam* (Women's Journal) began publication in Hanoi in 1931. The newspaper ran articles on numerous issues of interest to women. It proposed that young Vietnamese women ought to part their hair in ways that would allow them to be identified as being married or not.<sup>40</sup> It printed articles on the difficult relations between wives and their mothers-in-law.<sup>41</sup> The newspaper published articles promoting reading for women and provided suggestions of appropriate reading material for women.<sup>42</sup> It not only discussed women's issues but also openly considered itself a feminist journal and suggested that Vietnamese women follow the example of their Japanese, Chinese, American and European sisters in demanding the right to participate in 'public affairs.'<sup>43</sup> However, the newspaper did suggest that participation in public life need not prevent a woman from being a virtuous mother:

Nearly all the married young women today in our country, exposed to new ideas, tend to leave behind their household life in order to

engage in public affairs. . . . Far be it for me to completely support traditional family customs. However, I advise today's young married women to make themselves virtuous . . . to prepare to become virtuous mothers while also fulfilling their social duties.<sup>44</sup>

Another newspaper, *Dan Ba Moi*, actually proposed women's suffrage in 1935, and in order to convince its readers that this was an idea whose time had come, the newspaper provided a list of all countries that had already given women the right to vote.<sup>45</sup> Such overt calls for women's suffrage were the exception.

In these early women's journals Vietnamese women also invoked images of past heroines to express their wishes for greater educational opportunities and an expanded role in shaping the future of their nation:

Alas, we have eyes and ears; we are made of flesh like our brothers. We share with them our suffering, our miseries, and yet we are vilified while they are esteemed . . . as wives, we are slaves to our husbands and servants to our children. During our entire lives we languish behind the four walls and we are ignorant of the country's affairs. Under such conditions it is difficult to distinguish ourselves, to render ourselves useful to our country, to walk in the footsteps of our two great heroines, Trung Trac and Trung Nhi.<sup>46</sup>

Women's issues were not always the purview of women's journals alone. Other newspapers engaged in the debate on women's rights or published articles and editorials of interest to Vietnamese women. In 1927, for example, the newspaper *Bao Dong Phap* published an article written by a woman named Madame Cuu Ru who called for the creation of a 'league for the uplift of the dignity of women in marriage.' The article suggested that reforms were necessary to make the Vietnamese marriage institution more 'equal.' The article avoided controversy through understatement when it stated that current Vietnamese marriage practices no longer met the needs of the 'present situation.'<sup>47</sup> Others, like *Ngo Bao*, complained that women's education was too similar to that of men and that women were learning the arts of puericulture and hygiene too late in their education to be of any use.<sup>48</sup> In 1933 the newspaper *Monde* published a series of articles, under the title of *Women's Tribune*, that explored the women's rights issue and that pointed out Vietnamese women's contributions to the independence movement. Nguyễn Thi Khanh, who had been a writer at *Phu Nu Thoi Dam*, analysed the political nature of the women's movement, exploring the differences between bourgeois and Marxist interpretations of feminism.<sup>49</sup> While bourgeois women tended to focus particularly on issues such as political rights, women influenced by Marxism tended to focus on improving women's economic and social conditions.

## Anti-colonial women's associations

In addition to education and to newspapers and periodicals, women also formed associations within which they could explore their roles within Vietnamese society. One example was the *Nu Cong Hoc Hoi* (Women's Labour Association). An activist named Dam Phuong founded the association in 1926 in Huế. It criticized Confucian values, such as the Three Obediences and the Four Virtues. It also strove to provide Vietnamese women with 'occupational and marketable skills'.<sup>50</sup> The association sought to improve the 'intellect and morals' of Vietnamese women by offering courses in various domestic arts (cooking, embroidery, puericulture, hygiene and silk weaving).<sup>51</sup> The association had the support of Phan Boi Chau and so such nationalist overtones inevitably attracted the attention of French colonial authorities. They were quick to point out that some of the women involved in the association were friends of well-known anti-colonial activists (such as Nguyen The Truyen for example). One member, Tran Thi Mau was a former schoolteacher who had been fired because of her participation in school strikes in 1926.<sup>52</sup> Even more troublesome for French colonial authorities was the police report that there were attempts to form branches of the association elsewhere, particularly in Hanoi.<sup>53</sup> Another intelligence report in the early 1930s suggested that the communists were operating within 'connected organizations' including, 'les associations féminines'.<sup>54</sup>

Such suspicions concerning Vietnamese associations had developed over the first two decades of the twentieth century. While secret societies had been rendered formally illegal in Việt Nam by a decree issued in the late nineteenth century, French colonial authorities had initially encouraged the creation, in Việt Nam, of French-style associations. In 1898 the *Charte de la Mutualité* was enacted. As Vietnamese resistance to French rule persisted these associations, many subsidized by colonial coffers, were viewed more suspiciously. By 1936 virtually all associations were deemed anti-French. A letter from the Governor General to the French minister of Colonies made this clear:

I fully agree that republican political associations have in the métropole played an active role in the defense of our institutions. The same does not hold true for the new countries, the colonies, where political action must remain in the background for fear it will generate among the native peoples, who are ill-prepared in the exercise of civil rights, disorders the likes of which we have seen all too often. It has been found to be a fact that associations, whose purposes were not initially political, gradually extended their mandates to include politics.<sup>55</sup>

Such fears were not wholly unfounded since as early as 1927, a young Vietnamese woman named Nguyễn Thị Minh Khai, who would later be



associated with the more radical Vietnamese independence groups, organized in Vinh the creation of a Women's Emancipation Association. Other branches were established in Huê and in Quang Tri. Part of the association's mandate was to recruit women peasants and workers for the anti-French movement. In 1931 the newspaper *Dong Phuong* published an article calling for greater feminist action. The author suggested that women needed to claim their rights, to improve their material and intellectual situations, and to form an activist feminist organization.<sup>56</sup> It too fell short of openly calling for women's suffrage.

### **Marxism and women's suffrage in Việt Nam**

The foundation of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in 1930 raised the Vietnamese women's movement to a different level. Vietnamese socialists and communists were gaining ground, in terms of membership, on more moderate nationalists who now were often tagged as collaborators. The ICP, with its promises to grant women equality, became the most viable group for Vietnamese women's aspirations. At the outset, Vietnamese communists followed Ho Chi Minh's proposition that the success of the revolution depended upon the participation of women. During the first Central Committee Plenum, in October 1930, the ICP declared that women's emancipation and equality was one of the 'ten principal tasks of the revolution.'<sup>57</sup> In addition, the party promised to put an end to such practices as polygamy and arranged marriages. They called for women's rights to more educational opportunities, and to the right to divorce. They also called for universal suffrage, for access to positions within the colonial administration.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the ICP's recognition of the plight of Vietnamese women, it nonetheless focused primarily on its two principal goals: national liberation and social revolution. The question of women's equality was not addressed except as it pertained to the larger problem of colonial oppression. As one communist political tract stated in 1930:

Oh, unhappy patriots, let us struggle alongside our men. Let us destroy the French capitalists, the mandarins, in order to establish a social government that will give us freedom, equality and happiness. . . . Let us work and act energetically in order to achieve the Revolution, to obtain equality between men and women.<sup>59</sup>

The prevailing analysis within the ICP was that gender inequalities were the result of Confucianism and colonialism. During the period of Chinese invasion and occupation (111 B.C.E.–939 C.E.), Confucianism had been imposed, resulting in constraints such as the Three Obediences and the Four Virtues, and sexist practices such as polygamy, arranged or forced marriages, the preference for male heirs, and the restriction to remain

within the domestic sphere. For their part, the French had brought capitalism and its ensuing economic inequities. Furthermore, if French rule had managed to expose Vietnamese women to notions of freedom and equality, it had nonetheless created an individualistic interpretation of feminism, one that could serve only the daughters of a Vietnamese bourgeois elite. The premise of this analysis was that only socialism was capable of achieving true equality of the sexes in Vietnamese society, yet there were attempts to negotiate an agreement between the bourgeois and the Marxist notions of feminism. A newspaper editorial in 1937 stated that: 'the feminist movement in Indochina, as everywhere else, has two principal tendencies: the bourgeois tendency and the proletarian tendency. But given the actual state of affairs, Indochinese women from different perspectives can struggle on common ground.'<sup>60</sup>

Lê Duân, one of the founding members of the ICP made clear the place of women's rights within the larger context of Vietnamese independence: 'The emancipation of women must be associated with national liberation and the liberation of the working class. If the nation and the working class are not liberated, the women will not be liberated.'<sup>61</sup> These sentiments were echoed in *Phu Nu Tan Van* when in 1934 it overtly stated that the women's question was essentially only a part of the 'entire social question.'<sup>62</sup>

With the founding of the ICP came also the creation of the Women's Union for Emancipation (it would later be known as the Women's Union). Like the ICP, the Women's Union recruited women among all socio-economic classes of Vietnamese society, drawing to its ranks peasants and labourers. It sought to promote women's equality and women's participation in political affairs, but even as late as 1948 in the DRV it insisted that women's equality could come only after Vietnam could defeat French forces and regain national independence.<sup>63</sup> It was considered futile to think that Vietnamese women would be granted citizenship or suffrage under French colonial rule when most Vietnamese men also had no such rights. Suffrage could therefore be granted to men and women only when French colonial rule ended.

### **Women's suffrage and Việt Nam's independence**

The end of the Second World War and the success of the August revolution resulted in the immediate enactment of universal suffrage. In 1946 Vietnamese women made up 2.5 per cent of the first legislative assembly. In 1951, in the second legislature, women constituted 11.6 per cent of the total membership. This percentage rose to 29.7 per cent in 1972 and 32.3 per cent in 1975.<sup>64</sup> In 1983 this percentage was down to 21.7 per cent, but there were 23 Vietnamese women who served as ministers or deputy ministers.<sup>65</sup> In 1998 the Vietnam Women's Union claimed that the 'proportion of women in leading positions within the Communist Party of Vietnam

keeps growing.<sup>66</sup> They also maintained that women formed 10.5 per cent of the Central Committee membership. At the provincial and municipal levels, they constituted 7 and 15 per cent (respectively) of the membership.<sup>67</sup> In the 1997 elections Vietnam counted 118 women deputies, that is 26.2 per cent of the seats.<sup>68</sup> While the Vietnam Women's Union states it will strive to raise these percentages, the fact remains that only a handful of nations throughout the world can boast of higher women's representation in their elected legislative bodies. In this respect at least, the revolution has kept the promises it had made to Vietnamese women.

In addition, amendments to Việt Nam's constitutions were intended to elaborate and to enforce these gains in women's political rights. Article 24 of the 1959 constitution states that:

Women in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of political, economic, cultural, social and domestic life. For equal work, women enjoy equal pay with men. The State ensures that women workers and office employees have fully paid periods of leave before and after childbirth. The State protects the mother and child and ensures the development of maternity hospitals, creches and kindergartens. The State protects marriage and the family.<sup>69</sup>

As for women's right to vote, this had been promulgated by a series of decrees in 1945, even prior to the completion of the Constitution of 1946.<sup>70</sup> The 1959 constitution was an elaboration on that of 1946:

Citizens of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam who have reached the age of twenty-one have the right to stand for election, whatever their nationality, race, sex, social origin, belief, property status, education, occupation, or length of residence, except insane persons and persons deprived by a court or by law of the right to vote and stand for election. (Article 23)<sup>71</sup>

The constitutional pledge to grant women equality within marriage is also enshrined in Việt Nam's Civil Code: 'The wife and the husband are equal; they have equal rights and obligations in all respects in their family and in civil transactions; together they build a well provided for, strong, harmonious and happy family.' (Article 36)<sup>72</sup> Even in the current Marxist context, there persists the tendency to link modern Vietnamese women fighters with those of the distant past. Just prior to reunification in 1975, Lê Duan stated:

The Viet Nam fatherland owes its heroic sons and daughters to the contributions of heroic, undaunted, faithful and responsible mothers. For many centuries, the Vietnamese mothers have handed down to us

the mettle of the Trung Sisters and Lady Triệu, the tradition of industrious labour and love of country and home. We can rightly be proud of our Vietnamese mothers.<sup>73</sup>

The Three Obediences have given way to the Three Responsibilities (to the state, the revolution, and the family). Just as the Nu Tac was intended to transmit gender roles and norms, the Voice of Viet Nam (radio broadcasting) now serves an equally didactic purpose. As Lê Thi Nham Tuyêt demonstrates, when describing the fifteen minute daily broadcasts addressed to women, the Three Responsibilities are being promoted through features such as: 'Women and Family Happiness,' 'Women in Relation with their Husbands,' 'Women and Education and Care for Children,' 'Women and their Behaviour' and so on. The representations of Vietnamese women at Hanoi's Women's Museum also reflect the Three Responsibilities. There are countless exhibits and photographs of women fighters, defending the Vietnamese nation (the state), like latter-day Trung Sisters. There are also numerous exhibits pointing out women's contributions to the Vietnamese economy, to the achievement of the socialist revolution. Many are shown toiling in fields, working at handicrafts while also looking after their children. These Vietnamese women, as many scholars who have visited the museum have noted and remarked, are nameless, more often than not anonymous. Unlike their male counterparts, only a select few are mentioned by name. For the most part, these Vietnamese heroines appear relegated to the Vietnamese revolution version of Confucianism's Inner Quarters. When recognized, women like Nguyễn Thi Ut, who fought during the American War, they are described as 'fighting mothers.' Nguyễn Thi Dinh, Commander-in-Chief in 1965 of the South's liberation forces and a veritable force of nature, who had received numerous awards for her exploits against American forces, was also commended for her 'obedience' to the Party's directives:

In over forty years of revolutionary activity Comrade Nguyen Thi Dinh has always been present in the battle field and has endured many hardships in the service of the revolution. She has an unshakable faith in the Party and Uncle Ho and resolutely comes forward to fulfil any assignment given her by the Party and the people.<sup>74</sup>

As such, Nguyễn Thi Dinh's contributions are recognized through awards and medals – but the obvious leadership abilities that enabled her to achieve them are not mentioned. Her willingness to follow directives appears more important.

To this day, the image of the Vietnamese woman is consistent with those of earlier times. The fighter/mother is represented in mass media, in monuments, in museums. Even if women's emancipation was forged within the context of French colonial policies and Western notions of

equality, the Vietnamese representation of this emancipation is that of the Vietnamese ability to surmount obstacles imposed from outside the nation. Of course the revolutionary legislation of women's rights does not necessarily translate into changes in attitudes towards women. The Confucian legacy remains deeply entrenched as do the symbols of Vietnamese national identity.

## Notes

- 1 It is necessary to qualify the notion of Vietnamese independence at this point. The Indochinese Communist Party, under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, and others, had managed, from 1930 onward, to develop a broad base of support, particularly in northern Việt Nam. The communists were therefore able to capitalize on this achievement and on the power vacuum left by the defeat of the Japanese occupying forces in August 1945. By 1946, however, France sought to retake its former colony ensuing in the Franco-Vietminh War (1946–54). The DRV, in 1945, was therefore restricted to the northern part of Việt Nam. After the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, the DRV continued its attempts at reunification. After the withdrawal of United States forces in 1975, reunification was achieved and the DRV became the Socialist Republic of Việt Nam.
- 2 'Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam 1946,' *The Constitutions of Vietnam, 1946–1959–1980–1992*, Hanoi: Thê Gioi Publishers, 1995, pp. 13–17.
- 3 The Three Obediences stipulated that throughout her life a woman owed obedience to her father, then her husband, and upon widowhood, to her eldest son. The Four Virtues were: a humble character; gentleness of speech; proper appearance; and, diligence with respect to domestic tasks.
- 4 Mai Thi Tu and Lê Thi Nham Tuyêt, *Women in Vietnam*, Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1978, p. 82.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- 6 Lê Thi Nham Tuyêt, 'Images of Women in Mass Media,' in *Some Research on Gender, Family and Environment in Development*, 2, Hanoi: Research Center for Gender, Family, and Environment in Development, 1996, p. 104.
- 7 Hoang Van Co, *La femme Vietnamienne*, Saigon: Editions Son Hai, 1960, p. 92.
- 8 Mai and Lê, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
- 9 Ta Van Tai, 'The Status of Women in Traditional Vietnam,' *Journal of Asian History*, 15, 1981, 97–145.
- 10 Ngo Vinh Long, *Vietnamese Women in Society and Revolution*, Cambridge, Mass.: Vietnam Resource Center, 1974, p. 8.
- 11 It should be pointed out that this domestic realm included not only child-rearing and domestic chores within the home, but also general control of the family's economy. Vietnamese women participated in most phases of agricultural production and many were also responsible for the production of crafts. They most often were the ones who traveled to market towns to sell the family's wares and goods, and they were also responsible for the trade of commodities. In elite circles, according to Truong Thanh Dam, the private domestic realm also included 'activities such as cultural amusements (music and literature) of the aristocracy.' Truong Thanh Dam, 'Social Consciousness of the Vietnamese Women's Movement in the Twentieth Century,' *Working Paper – Sub-series on Women's History and Development*, 3, 1984, p. 5. Other scholars point out that Vietnamese women were perceived as having so much power within the domestic realm that popular parlance referred to them as 'generals of the interior.' Hoang Van Co, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

- 12 Mariam Darce Frenier and Kimberly Mancini, 'Vietnamese Women in a Confucian Setting: The Causes of the Initial Decline in the Status of East Asian Women,' in Kathleen Barry (ed.), *Vietnam's Women in Transition*, London: Macmillan, 1996, p. 32.
- 13 This is not to suggest, by any means, that women did not possess any agency. They were sometimes able to influence decisions taken at the village or other levels. However, this influence was not formalized. It was a tacit influence intended to reinforce the notion that women had no place in public affairs, outside of the home or the home economy.
- 14 Mary Ann Tétreault, 'Women and Revolution in Vietnam,' in Kathleen Barry (ed.), *Vietnam's Women in Transition*, London: Macmillan, 1996, p. 48.
- 15 Cochinchina was the name given to one of the three French colonial administrative regions in Việt Nam. Once French rule had been consolidated in 1885, Việt Nam was divided into Tonkin (in the north), Annam (in the center), and Cochinchina (in the south).
- 16 Ngo Vinh Long, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- 19 David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920–1945*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.
- 20 Mai and Lê, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
- 21 Mai Thi Tu, 'The Vietnamese Woman Yesterday and Today,' *Vietnamese Studies*, 10, 1966, 28.
- 22 Marr, *op. cit.*, p. 210.
- 23 Alexander B. Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*, Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1976, pp. 57–8.
- 24 Phan Boi Chau, 'The New Vietnam,' cited in Truong Buu Lam (ed.), *Colonialism Experienced. Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism 1900–1931*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000, p. 114.
- 25 *Ibid.* Phan Boi Chau's views on the education of women were no doubt influenced by Chinese and particularly Japanese reformers, but his linking of the role of mothers and of patriotism is very Vietnamese.
- 26 The Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc had been founded in Hanoi by a group of Vietnamese intellectuals such as Luong Van Can. The school was tuition-free and offered a modern, Western curriculum, including mathematics, the sciences, politics and history. With its own printing press, the school also published a number of pamphlets and articles on a variety of subjects. The nationalist nature of the school soon attracted the attention of French colonial authorities who ordered it shut down in 1908.
- 27 Truong Thanh Dam, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
- 28 Hue Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 91.
- 29 *La revue du Pacifique*, 2, 1923, 207. A more detailed account of French colonial attitudes regarding the education of Vietnamese women can be found in Micheline R. Lessard, 'Civilizing Women: French Colonial Perceptions of Vietnamese Womanhood and Motherhood,' in Tamara L. Hunt and Micheline R. Lessard (eds), *Women and the Colonial Gaze*, London: Palgrave, 2002, pp. 148–61.
- 30 Marie Poirier, 'La conquête de la femme indigène en pays d'Annam,' *Revue Indochinoise*, 3, 1914, 320.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 319. All translations by the author.
- 32 Pascale Bezançon, *Une colonisation éducatrice? L'expérience indochinoise (1860–1945)*, Paris: l'Harmattan, 2002, p. 92.

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## 6 Citizenship and suffrage in interwar Japan

*Barbara Molony*

The women's suffrage movement in Japan in the 1920s and early 1930s actively addressed the meanings of citizenship, and to a lesser degree, nationality and the condition of being a subject. Unlike most other Asian countries at the time, Japan was not under the colonial control of an outside power; indeed, Japan held colonies of its own. In their struggle for suffrage, Japanese feminists took for granted their Japanese nationality; what they struggled for was citizenship in the sense of inclusion in the state. The condition of subjection to state sovereignty (in the case of prewar Japan this was reified in the form of the emperor) was contested by some feminists, principally on the left, who sought revolutionary change in the entire political system, but was not itself resisted by the majority of suffragists.<sup>1</sup> Although some scholars view 1920s suffragism as a form of resistance that feminists abandoned in the militaristic 1930s,<sup>2</sup> this study argues that suffragism in the interwar period was, rather, the embodiment of feminists' quest for full citizenship in the Japanese nation.

Advocates for improving the condition of women held diverse political positions and espoused a variety of agendas to achieve their goals. Many resisted particular policies of the state while agitating for greater state protection of women against private sources of power like exploitative employers or the patriarchal family system. Interwar feminists rarely equated women's rights with nationalism, as was often the case in areas under colonialism; in fact, nationalism in prewar Japan implied the outward thrust of imperialism rather than the inward-directed nation-building and identity-forming meaning it had in colonial territories. Most, though not all, feminists in Japan opposed expansive militarism before the late 1930s, although they did not oppose membership in the state and protection by the state. Only rarely did feminists question Japan's holding of colonies despite their strong condemnation of Japan's militaristic expansionism during the 1930s. When they did discuss the colonies, it was to call for rights of Japanese citizenship for people under colonialism.

This study will examine the rhetoric and actions of feminists, including the 1919 founding of the New Woman Association and the 1924 founding

of the Women's Suffrage League, and the collaboration, for the cause of suffrage, of progressive, socialist, and bourgeois women's groups during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

By the late 1930s, advocacy of suffragism seemed threateningly non-Japanese to the increasingly militaristic authorities, and feminist groups were either repressed or required to modify their demands to accommodate a new type of nationalism. Instead of demanding the ballot, some feminists in the 1930s inserted themselves in local governance issues like trash collection or regulating food markets or in national issues like campaigns against bribery in national elections. Were these a form of citizenship, or were they cooptation by the state? What did membership in the nation mean to suffragists? Was the changing role of the empire significant in feminists' relationship to the Japanese state?

### **Theorizing citizenship**

In a legal sense, *citizenship* refers to *nationality*; that is, a citizen holds documentation indicating he or she is, to a greater or lesser extent, under the protection of the consular offices of the home country when outside that country. Nationality does not necessarily guarantee the rights that are embodied in the other common discourse on citizenship, that is, agency and empowerment in decision-making. Before the granting of suffrage rights, a woman could be a national without having the full rights of citizenship. Both citizenship and nationality have long been profoundly gendered categories. In the United States between 1907 and 1922, for instance, a female native-born American citizen/national was required to assume her husband's nationality if he was not an American. In Japan before 1983 a child could inherit only his or her father's nationality; mothers could not pass their nationality on to their children if their father was not Japanese.<sup>3</sup> Citizenship, in the sense of participation in articulation of policy, has historically been gendered to an even greater degree than has nationality. While such participation is not limited to political rights, its highest form, in a liberal democratic state, is membership in the polity. Membership often includes a productive and paid role in the economy, but its definitive expression is the right to vote. Despite the common notion that citizenship defined as the right to vote principally implies agency and empowerment, citizenship has additional meanings. Suffrage is also a marker of social standing, particularly in a polity in which the state withholds suffrage rights from some classes of people. The right to vote is 'a certificate of full membership in society.'<sup>4</sup>

The right to vote is the end of a long line of demands for political and social membership, and does not stand, *sui generis*, as an isolated demand. Moreover, while feminists, including those in Japan in the 1920s, have asserted that the vote is the key that permits women to be involved in civic participation,<sup>5</sup> the relationship of suffrage to civic participation is more

complicated than that. Women's civic participation, before women gained the vote, in Japan and elsewhere, was used to justify the demand for political rights. Civic participation and suffrage are, in this sense, mutually imbricated. Interestingly, while civic participation was cited, before men or women were enfranchised, as the reason why they deserved the vote, once they received the vote, they did not have to continue civic participation or any other deeds of 'good citizenship' to retain that right. In this sense, citizens with suffrage resembled subjects who also retained their status – that of subjecthood – regardless of their activities. To be sure, in Japan, subjects were constantly exhorted to shoulder responsibility to serve their monarch and state as good soldiers, good wives and mothers, or other good Japanese, but they did not need to carry out any particular activities to be considered subjects.

## Background

The two-way street between suffrage-based citizenship and civic participation has roots in nineteenth-century women's rights movements in Japan. Demands for women's rights (*joken*) did not yet embrace suffragism at that time, and feminists framed rights more in terms of liberty (*jiyū*) than in terms of participation in government. That is, they demanded the recognition of women's personhood (earned through education), equality in marriage, and the right of civic participation, which were all aspects of liberty and markers of social status.<sup>6</sup> Women should be 'citizens' (*kokumin*)<sup>7</sup> with the right to civic participation, wrote Shimizu Tomoko in 1890, for moral and social reasons – they should support their husbands in their exercise of citizenship and educate their children as future citizens.<sup>8</sup> For other feminists in the 1880s and 1890s, the struggle for 'women's rights' was an attack on the privileges of patriarchy – polygamy, prostitution, and patrilineality – embedded in Japanese law and society in that era.<sup>9</sup>

In previous works, I have discussed the importance of maternalism – that is, ideologies that focused on the glorification of potential or actual motherhood – as both abetting the state's denial of equality to women as well as justifying feminists who argued, with some success, that women's special roles as mothers made them deserving of a voice in public policy.<sup>10</sup> To a certain extent, this parallels the position of Sharon Nolte and Sally Hastings in their influential 1991 article, in which they write, 'The Japanese state [in the late Meiji period] denied political rights to women because the state's claims on the home preempted women's claims on the state.'<sup>11</sup> While Nolte and Hastings focus more on the role of the wife than on the role of the mother, both their wife-focused and my maternalist arguments explain women's lack of equality in citizenship in terms of particular social contributions assumed to be made by women. While many feminists did, indeed, make use of maternalist discourse in their

quest for rights, and the state frequently used maternalist or 'wife-ist' arguments to deny women rights of citizenship, a more useful paradigm would focus on the state's position that all Japanese were subjects first, with some privileged groups incrementally gaining rights associated with citizenship. Women, despite feminists' struggle for the status of citizens – whether by demanding equality or by highlighting their gendered contributions – continued to be seen as subjects. As Vera Mackie cogently notes, 'Official discourse primarily constructed women as subjects who could be mobilized to support state policies, rather than citizens who had a right to participate in shaping those policies.'<sup>12</sup> In the interwar era, which spans the decades of the 1910s through the 1930s, many, perhaps most, feminists worked to expand women's rights beyond those of mere subjects to embrace those of citizenship.

By the end of the decade of the 1910s, the notion of women as part of the decision-making polity and not merely as subjects entered Japanese feminist discourse and action. Political rights quickly emerged as the dominant demand. Liberal feminists were gradually joined by an important segment of the socialist feminist movement. While suffragist feminists were calling for membership in the Japanese state, they also were forging ties with international feminist movements. Internationalism and suffragism fell on hard times in the late 1930s, however, as the militarist government repressed them. Repression forced feminist groups either to disband or redirect their attention to participating in civic activities that served the state in various ways. This civic participation offered many women recognition of their important standing in society, but because it did not earn women the right to participate in policy formation, women's civic participation in Japan in the 1930s cannot be considered a form of citizenship. Feminists' retreat from suffragism was not an abandonment of a 1920s and early 1930s position of resistance to the state as most feminists had been attempting to *join* the state, but rather a return to a much earlier practice of feminist advocacy under the condition of subjecthood.

### **The New Woman Association and citizenship rights**

Feminist advocacy under the condition of subjecthood resembled feminist advocacy for citizenship rights in that both assumed women were part of the nation. Japanese subjects were part of a 'family state' (*kazoku kokka*) whose 'father' was the emperor, and this inclusion in the (discursive) national family permitted women's advocates to petition the state to protect women from economic or societal exploitation. As subjects, however, women had no claim on the state to include them in its governance. Thus, the other type of feminist advocacy – the demand for civic participation and suffrage – while it similarly assumed the desirability of inclusion, differed in that it emphasized that inclusion of women as citizens did not yet exist. The New Woman Association (*Shin Fujin Kyōkai*),

founded in 1919, embraced both of these types of feminism: the demand for protection of women as subjects of the family state and the demand for the civil rights of inclusion.<sup>13</sup> To achieve the rights of protection and inclusion, women first had to identify as a class, noted Hiratsuka Raichō, one of the group's three founders (Ichikawa Fusae and Oku Mumeo were the other two). In late November 1919, Hiratsuka delivered a speech for the All-Kansai Federation of Women's Organizations entitled 'Toward the Unification of Women.' Shortly thereafter, Ichikawa joined Hiratsuka to draft the NWA's demands: 1) the revision of Article 5 of the Public Peace Police Law to allow women to participate in political activity (a step toward citizenship rights), and 2) the passage of legislation that would allow women to break engagements with or divorce men diagnosed with syphilis (a form of state protection for women against the patriarchal family).<sup>14</sup> In the interwar era, male sexuality was identified with patriarchy, which was supported by law and by the state. The politicization of male sexuality thus rendered the demand for protection a political act; this led the members of the NWA to give priority to revision of Article 5 because it limited women's political actions.<sup>15</sup>

The NWA submitted a petition to the Diet to revise Article 5, but the petition never made it out of committee to the full floor of the Diet before its adjournment in February 1920. The feminist group resubmitted the petition to later parliamentary sessions, finally getting approval by the House of Representatives to amend the clause of Article 5 which prohibited women from participating in political rallies. As it had in the late Meiji period, the House of Peers again rejected the proposed revision of Article 5, following a speech by one of that body's powerful leaders, Baron Fujimura Yoshirō, who blustered:

Giving women the right to participate in political movements subverts the family system that is the basis of our social system. I think the behaviour of these new women – these groups of peculiar women trying to become politically active – is extremely shameful.<sup>16</sup>

Although the liberal feminists of the NWA struggled for respect and inclusion in the Japanese polity, they were often reluctant to state that their primary goal was women's equal rights because demanding equal political rights for women was tainted with an aura of selfishness, though feminist social reform was not. Consequently, Hiratsuka wrote in the first issue of the NWA's journal, *Josei Dōmei*, that suffrage was not an end in itself but rather a means to inject new feminine values into the masculine political system.<sup>17</sup> A few months later, the December 1920 and January 1921 issues supplemented the earlier demands for revision of Article 5 and protection of wives and fiancées from marriage to syphilitic men with a call for revising the House of Representatives Election Law to grant voting rights of some sort to women. Among the NWA leaders, Ichikawa

Fusae began to differentiate her point of view from that of Hiratsuka. While the latter placed more emphasis on protection of women as mothers (*bokenshugi*) and wives, Ichikawa began to devote more of her energies to what she called the 'principle of women's rights' (*jokenshugi*). 'Aren't we [women] treated completely as feeble-minded children?' she wrote in 1920. 'A man, no matter what his occupation or educational background, has political rights, but a woman, no matter how qualified, does not have the same rights.'<sup>18</sup> With that, Ichikawa staked out her position as an equal-rights feminist.

The post-World War I climate in Japan encouraged a variety of feminisms, and socialist feminism, which had operated in a fairly low-key manner during the previous decade, re-emerged with vigour. In April 1921, Yamakawa Kikue, Sakai (Kondō) Magara, Itō Noe (formerly of the Bluestocking Association), Takatsu Tayoko, Akizuki Shizue, Kutsumi Fusako, Hashiura Haruko and others created the *Sekirankai* (Red Wave Society) whose goal was to liberate society from the social and economic inequities of capitalism.<sup>19</sup> The Red Wave manifesto condemned capitalism for turning women into 'slaves at home and oppress[ing] us as wage slaves outside the home. It turns many of our sisters into prostitutes.'<sup>20</sup> As feminists, the Red Wave Society recognized the oppression of women, although class oppression rather than patriarchy was to blame. Thus, gaining citizenship through political participation in the capitalist state as it existed was not a primary goal for socialist feminists in the early 1920s.<sup>21</sup>

Personal and political differences with Hiratsuka induced Ichikawa to journey to the United States in the summer of 1921. There she came into contact with noted US feminists like Jane Addams and, most important for the formation of her suffragist ideology, Alice Paul.<sup>22</sup> While Ichikawa was in the United States, Oku Mumeo, the third founder of the NWA, lobbied Diet politicians until they delivered a favourable vote, in March 1922, on the revision of Article 5 to permit women to attend rallies and other political meetings. Fujimura Yoshirō noted that his meeting with Oku, who went to his home carrying her infant on her back, had changed his mind about extending limited political rights to women.<sup>23</sup> Oku's manipulation of an important symbol – of women as mothers who deserved to be integrated into the body politic precisely because of their maternalism – was crucial to the amendment's passage. Here Oku was taking the maternalist trope, often used by the state in its articulation of women's subjecthood, to expand women's inclusion in civic participation.

### **Civil rights in the early 1920s**

On the left, numerous groups grew out of the important though short-lived Red Wave Society. The Wednesday Society (*Suiyōkai*) of 1922 included socialists and non-socialists, men and women, and feminists Ishimoto Shizue, Yosano Akiko, and Kawasaki Natsu. It was succeeded by the

Eighth Day Society (*Yōkakai*), founded to mark Japan's first celebration, in 1923, of International Women's Day, 8 March.<sup>24</sup> Ichikawa Fusae and Oku Mumeo joined socialist women in the 1925 Political Institute Women's Division (*Seiji kenkyūkai fujinbu*), a group created to make policies for the first election under universal manhood suffrage.<sup>25</sup> Until its demise the following year, this group advocated the feminist goals of equality, abolition of the patriarchal family system, and abolition of licensed prostitution in addition to the socialist goal of a standard living wage irrespective of sex or ethnicity.<sup>26</sup> These groups, though small and short-lived, indicate the liveliness of discourse on the feminist left. They also indicate the socialist feminists' increasing desire for women's rights. Oku Mumeo, who had tended toward the left after leaving the NWA, wrote, in an article in the March 1925 issue of *Fujin undō*, that women could be rich or poor, of the capitalist class or of the proletarian class, but there was something that united all women – the lack of civil rights.<sup>27</sup>

By the middle of the 1920s, the earlier objection of many socialist feminists to focusing on the rights of citizenship began to give way to support for suffragism as an ameliorative measure on the way to changing the state. Moreover, following the devastating September 1923 earthquake, collaboration among feminists across the ideological spectrum in emergency relief, as well as the potential for mainstreaming of socialist ideas when proletarian men gained suffrage rights in 1925, contributed to the shared support for women's suffrage among groups that otherwise had rather different agendas. Suffrage came to be an accepted goal of feminists as a marker of inclusion in the governance of the nation.

The most important group other than the NWA to focus on suffrage in the early 1920s was the Christian Women's Reform Society (*Kirisutokyō Fujin Kyōfukai*), a Christian organization with strong international ties, particularly with the American Women's Christian Temperance Union. The Women's Reform Society added suffrage to its list of women's rights demands in the late 1910s. Although some Japanese dismissed the WRS because of its association with foreign religion and culture,<sup>28</sup> its members were generally from influential upper middle-class families with a strong tradition of civic involvement. The WRS, established in 1886 by Yajima Kajiko, worked in several areas of reform, all tied to ameliorating the conditions of women's lives: alcohol temperance (a policy also advocated by the Reform Society's American mentor group, the WCTU, though less central to the mission of Japan's WRS); anti-prostitution; and anti-concubinage.<sup>29</sup>

WRS Secretary Kubushiro Ochimi uttered the group's first call for women's voting rights in 1917. Disappointed in the Reform Society's failure to prevent the city of Ōsaka's approval of a huge new red-light district, Kubushiro noted that women had no clout without the vote. But her call failed to incite a suffrage movement in 1917. Starting in 1919, Kubushiro cooperated with the NWA, and again called for women's suffrage at the annual convention of the Reform Society in 1920.<sup>30</sup> WRS



member Gauntlett Tsune, just back from European conferences, concurred, adding that women's votes would help them work for peace. In July 1921, Kubushiro put her demand for votes in writing in an article in the WRS journal, *Fujin shinpō*.<sup>31</sup> That same month, Kubushiro, Gauntlett, and Ebina Miyako wrote a statement of principles and proclaimed the founding of the Japan Women's Suffrage Association (*Nihon Fujin San-seiken Kyōkai*), which initially had 32 members. Publicity for the new group appeared in *Fujin shinpō* by the following January.

Reform Society regional branches also figured prominently in women's political rights movements. Throughout Japan, but more commonly outside the capital, women involved in civic activities often joined several groups, some independent of the government, some connected to the government. In Akita Prefecture, for example, the Patriotic Women's Association (*Aikoku Fujinkai*) and the WRS, both opposed to prostitution, had some overlap in membership.<sup>32</sup> The middle- and upper-class members of these regional branches had not expressed much interest in votes for women until the 1920s, but came to see suffrage as a route to political reform by the mid-1920s.<sup>33</sup>

Other women's reform efforts that adopted a political rights agenda emerged in the 1920s. Unrelated to the issue of moral reform, consumer groups sought to rationalize housework by simplifying the kitchen and home. Oku Mumeo, prominent in the consumer movement following her departure from the NWA, advocated home simplification to permit women to get out of the kitchen and lead productive lives.<sup>34</sup> By the late 1920s, the consumer movement was explicitly connecting the home and politics, calling for women's political rights based on women's role in *consumption*, an interesting inversion of the standard equation of citizenship rights with *productivity*. Consumer groups were not exclusively middle class; working-class consumer groups emerged at approximately the same time as middle-class groups.<sup>35</sup> Oku herself was interested in reforming the conditions of life and work of proletarian women, for whom she founded the feminist Working Women's Association in 1923.<sup>36</sup>

Institutionally tied to both the consumer and Christian groups was the numerically largest pro-suffrage group of the 1920s, the All-Kansai Federation of Women's Organizations (*Zen Kansai Fujin Rengōkai*). The All-Kansai Federation was not a group in the same sense as the Reform Society or the various consumer groups. It was, rather, a coalition of a diverse variety of groups, initially organized by feminist journalist Onda Kazuko and held together by her newspaper, *Ōsaka Asahi shinbun*, until 1927, when it became independent of the newspaper. It was at the first annual meeting of the Federation that Hiratsuka Raichō had announced the formation of the NWA in 1919. Thereafter, the organizations of the Federation met in Ōsaka every year until 1941, except in 1928. The total membership of the groups meeting in Ōsaka was approximately 3,000,000; though many women's overlapping memberships might have inflated the total some-

what, the order of magnitude of this organization was far greater than that of any other contemporary women's rights groups either in Japan or overseas.<sup>37</sup>

By 1927, 340 women's associations, including alumnae groups, teachers' groups, prefectural women's associations, and religious groups, were represented at the annual Ōsaka meeting.<sup>38</sup> The wide attendance at these meetings both reflected the conveners' belief that women acting together could accomplish shared goals and was itself a product of the Taishō climate of support for women's rights. To be sure, women's suffrage rights were just one item on an agenda that included discussion of prostitution, temperance, the life improvement movement, education, employment, religion, equality, and infant care.<sup>39</sup> After the Women's Suffrage League (*Fusen Kakutoku Dōmei*), the most important suffrage organization of the interwar period, was established in 1924, Federation leaders successfully urged their members to establish regional branch offices of the WSL.<sup>40</sup> The Federation's support for the suffrage movement was essential to the movement, especially in kindling feminist spirit in the hinterlands and in creating a women-run network fostering women's autonomy that became the foundation for regional suffragism.<sup>41</sup>

### **The founding of the Women's Suffrage League**

The great earthquake that hit the Tokyo area on 1 September 1923 jolted women from housewives' groups, consumer cooperatives, alumnae associations, Christian and Buddhist religious groups, and socialist auxiliaries into collaboration on a wide variety of fronts. Initially coming together to undertake relief work for tens of thousands of homeless and hungry Tokyo residents, the 43 associations involved in these efforts organized as the Tokyo Federation of Women's Organizations in late September. They continued to meet after the emergency passed, dividing into five sections: society, employment, labour, education, and government.<sup>42</sup> In the fall of 1924 the WRS's Kubushiro Ochimi, director of the government section, called a meeting of those interested in working for women's political rights. The meeting gave birth to the principal women's suffrage organization of the interwar years, the League for the Realization of Women's Suffrage (*Fujin Sanseiken Kakutoku Kisei Dōmei*) on 13 December 1924. As its name indicated, the League for the Realization of Women's Suffrage would concentrate on obtaining civil rights for women. Suffrage rights, declared the manifesto proclaiming the founding of the organization, were essential to improving the status of Japanese women:

- 1 It is our responsibility to destroy customs that have existed in this country for the past twenty-six hundred years and to construct a new Japan that promotes the natural rights of men and women;
- 2 As women have been attending public schools with men for half a

century since the beginning of the Meiji period and our opportunities in higher education have continued to expand, it is unjust to exclude women from universal suffrage;

- 3 Political rights are necessary for the protection of nearly four million working women in this country;
- 4 Women who work in the household must be recognized before the law to realize their full human potential;
- 5 Without political rights we cannot achieve public recognition at either the national or local level of government;
- 6 It is both necessary and possible to bring together women of different religions and occupations in a movement for women's suffrage.<sup>43</sup>

To achieve these goals, the proclamation announced three resolutions: that women gain civic rights on the municipal level;<sup>44</sup> that the House of Representatives Election Law be revised to treat men and women equally; and that Article Five of the Public Peace Police Law be revised to permit women the freedom of political association.

A few months later, in February 1925, the Diet passed the so-called Universal Suffrage bill, which eliminated economic qualifications for male suffrage. Under the provisions of this law, male subjects over twenty-five were eligible to elect members of the House of Representatives, and those over thirty were permitted to become candidates for elective office. Although many liberals welcomed the expansion of the electorate, the WSL criticized the new legislation because 'giving the vote only to men and excluding women is not universal suffrage.'<sup>45</sup> Despite the Diet's recent limitation of suffrage rights by gender and its passage of a Peace Preservation Law designed to curb leftist political expression, feminists succeeded in convincing a small group of representatives to introduce several items for parliamentary discussion:

- 1 An amendment to the Public Peace Police Law of 1900 giving women the right to join political parties and associations;
- 2 A petition to encourage women's higher education;
- 3 A petition for women's suffrage in national elections;
- 4 A petition to make changes in the City Code (1888) and the Town and Village Code (1888), allowing women to vote and become candidates for office on the local level.<sup>46</sup>

When these four items came up for discussion on 10 March, some 200 women filled the visitors' section in the balcony overlooking the Diet chambers.<sup>47</sup> Opponents blasted the proposals, but they were in the minority and all four proposals were approved by the Lower House. Although the three petitions could not become law, and the Police Law amendment was killed in the Upper House, it is noteworthy that these proposals for expanding women's rights fared as well as they did.<sup>48</sup>

The proposals were successful at the Lower House level for both ideological and partisan reasons. A diverse body of support for various forms of women's rights had begun to emerge in the early 1920s. Among Diet supporters, the reasons cited for supporting women's political rights included: fairness; the need to make Japan appear less backward in international comparison; the desirability of rationalizing social and political rights and responsibilities; the importance of political participation as a means for women's self-development; the difficulty of male politicians' representing women's concerns; the aid women voters would give to the movement to abolish licensed prostitution; and the focus women would bring to clean government, public works, education, consumer services, international peace, and motherhood protection. Some also suggested that more radical feminism, like that of the Pankhursts in England, might be avoided by granting women the vote.<sup>49</sup> Partisan considerations also helped to generate Lower House support for women's rights. The Kenseikai party leadership was prodded into supporting the women's rights proposals after non-Kenseikai members had pre-empted the Kenseikai's usual position as the supporter of individual rights by introducing the measures in the Diet.

As the partial success of 10 March gave suffragist women hope that they might achieve civil rights, they realized that they would need the support of a broader segment of society. This objective was underscored at the League's 19 April 1925 'founding' meeting in Tokyo. The participants shortened the name of their group to Women's Suffrage League (*Fusen Kakutoku Dōmei*) and made a public appeal for *fusen*. This appeal was symbolically important. The women were fortunate in that *fusen*, when written with different characters, meant either 'universal suffrage' or 'women's suffrage.' *Fusen* had been on the lips of activists for years but had been virtually synonymous with 'male suffrage'; the WSL stated that universal suffrage (*fusen*) was incomplete without women's suffrage (*fusen*).<sup>50</sup> The April meeting concluded with a decision to create six committees within the Women's Suffrage League, to establish branch offices throughout the country, and to publish a magazine.

In October 1925, the central committee of the WSL began to form policies for creating branch offices when a group of women in Chiba Prefecture wished to set up a branch there. Although that effort failed when prefectural authorities pressured it to shut down, the WSL decided at the annual meeting in April 1927 to encourage the formation of a branch in each electoral district. The All-Kansai Federation of Women's Organizations lent its support in western Japan. The Federation had come a long way toward support of suffrage, creating a Civil Rights Research Division (*Sanseiken kenkyūbu*) in 1926, and sending out petition forms for suffrage beginning in 1927. The number of signatures climbed every year, reaching 100,000 in 1932.<sup>51</sup> New branches of the WSL were established throughout western Japan by Federation members. The Federation was not a

radical group, and maintained connections with government officials. It was those connections that made local authorities more tolerant of women's rights.<sup>52</sup>

By the late 1920s, suffragists were also making common cause with consumer advocates. Consumer movement activists described their goals in terms of societal and civic participation, though votes for women were not explicitly on the agenda until late in the decade. Consumer movements were quite varied, and their histories did not follow a single, simple trajectory. As early as 1922, the editors of one consumer magazine called on women to lead the movement because, they asserted, more peaceful women were not involved in the 'capitalist competition' that absorbed their husbands.<sup>53</sup> In contrast to the traditional male (proletarian) demand for a civic role based on their productive contributions, members of women's consumer unions would come to emphasize their economic contributions as consumers. Women had for decades been praised as producers<sup>54</sup> but consumers' groups were shifting the discourse from 'supply side' to 'demand side' in the 1920s. What appears unusual about this particular formulation of consumption-based analysis is its anti-capitalist thrust. Perhaps that made the consumer movement palatable to proletarian women's groups. Four working-class consumer-advocacy groups came together as the Consumers' Union League (*Shōhi kumiai renmei*) as early as 1922;<sup>55</sup> in 1926 it was reorganized as the Kantō Consumers' Union League. In October 1926 Oku wrote that though the proletarian consumers' movements had been led by men, they must now be led by women.<sup>56</sup>

The Kantō organization is an important example of the desire for self-determination among women in their role as consumers. In May 1928, Oku became president of the Women's Consumers' Union Association (*Fujin Shōhi Kumiai Kyōkai*), newly created by leading women's rights and consumer advocates.<sup>57</sup> Within a year there were affiliated groups throughout Japan and plans to work with agricultural cooperatives to integrate women into those cooperatives. Believing housewives formed an economic class, Oku and others called for political rights for women and joined with other suffragists of diverse groups, including those in the Women's Suffrage Coordinating Committee of 1928, in the fight for local political rights.<sup>58</sup> Women's desires for some type of voice in civic decision-making was finding outlets in many unexpected places.

Women on the left were another essential constituency for suffrage rights.<sup>59</sup> Separately constituted organizations proliferated because individuals' ideological differences caused them to focus on a variety of issues, but most included women's political rights among those issues. What is significant about this plethora of relatively small (a few dozen members each) proletarian women's rights groups is their cooperation despite their diversity. Much is made both of the gulf between the bourgeois feminist movement and the proletarian feminist movement and of

the ideology-based divisions among women on the left. To be sure, these groups rivalled one another, just as, among middle-class women, the Reform Society's suffrage arm competed with the WSL for leadership of the suffrage movement.<sup>60</sup> But because they were all disenfranchised and marginalized, women who supported political rights frequently cooperated to achieve that goal and several other goals (anti-prostitution, better working conditions for female labourers, motherhood protection, and better access to education were among the goals for which women across the ideological spectrum struggled). They differed in the attention they directed to various gender-specific issues, and proletarian-identified women claimed not to like bourgeois women's attitudes. Socialist Tajima Hide, for example, worked with the WSL for several months because her friend Ichikawa asked her to, but left when she felt she could no longer work with middle-class women.<sup>61</sup> Christian women were put off by other feminists' smoking and drinking. But activists were pragmatic, and by the late 1920s recognized the opportunities for cooperation. Evidence suggests that feminism, rather than dividing women, was one discourse diverse women could buy into.<sup>62</sup> This was particularly true of the political rights aspect of feminism, because all activists sought a voice and, in varying degrees, inclusion in civil society. This was the core of *sanseiken* – literally, the right of political participation. Feminism had many faces, and its diversity strengthened its appeal. While some feminists would not have agreed with Ichikawa that suffrage was a shortcut to liberation because 'liberation' was variously defined, they certainly valued political rights.

### **The election of 1928 and the 'Period of Hope'**

The election of 1928, the first one in which the expanded male electorate could vote,<sup>63</sup> seemed to offer an ideal opportunity for feminists to advance the cause of women's political inclusion. This would require helping (male) candidates who supported women's civil rights win their races, irrespective of their party affiliations. Neutrality, as non-partisanship was called at the time, defined the activities and ultimately the ideology of Ichikawa Fusae and the Women's Suffrage League.<sup>64</sup> In line with this policy, the WSL campaigned around the country speaking on behalf of candidates who supported women's suffrage.<sup>65</sup> Of the fourteen candidates the feminists supported publicly, four were members of the two dominant parties, the Seiyūkai and Minseitō (formerly Kenseikai). The remainder represented proletarian parties. Because they did not limit themselves to making speeches only for politicians of one party, WSL members were criticized. Oku Mumeo charged that the WSL acted like prostitutes, going to men of the 'Seiyūkai in the morning and the Social Democratic Party in the evening.'<sup>66</sup> Yoshino Sakuzō, Ichikawa's long-time friend in academia, wrote to warn her against kowtowing to politicians from the major

political parties. 'As long as one says he supports women's suffrage,' Yoshino wrote, 'you do not care if he is a thief or some other vagrant. If I were in your position, I would not indiscriminately support members of the establishment parties.'<sup>67</sup>

Emerging from the election in February, the Seiyūkai controlled 217 seats and the Minseitō 216. Proletarian parties claimed eight seats.<sup>68</sup> Neither the Seiyūkai nor the Minseitō controlled a majority in the Lower House, which gave the proletarian parties a voice. Seven of the fourteen candidates the WSL had supported won their races.<sup>69</sup> Support for women's rights would have to come from a coalition of legislators. Ironically, it was partisan considerations that advanced the cause of women's rights in the next several years.

The WSL's central committee met on 2 March 1928 to discuss strategy, and came up with a plan to form a Women's Suffrage Coordinating Committee (*Fusen Kakutoku Kyōdō Inkaï*).<sup>70</sup> The next day they sent an invitation to five women's suffrage advocacy groups to join in pressing the newly elected parliament to vote for civil rights.<sup>71</sup> Some 300 people attended a 21 April meeting billed as 'Women's Suffrage and the Political Parties' at which several business leaders as well as representatives of all major parties, proletarian as well as the Seiyūkai and Minseitō, spoke. The following day, the four proletarian groups in the Committee issued a statement calling for women's suffrage as the best way to improve home life, factory conditions, and the farm.<sup>72</sup> The Committee continued its work until December 1929, when it formally disbanded.

Women continued to expand their involvement in public activities in other ways, as well. Stressing in May 1928 that the consumer movement 'as a mass movement would be the foundation stone of the women's civil rights movement,'<sup>73</sup> Oku Mumeo founded the Women's Consumer Union Association (*Fujin Shōhi Kumiai Kyōkai*). In January 1929, the organization proclaimed that its functions would include the cleaning up of Tokyo's scandal-ridden municipal government, lowering electricity, water, gas, and transportation costs, building more hospitals, setting up employment agencies for women, running night schools for women, and advocating institutions that would help mothers and children such as milk-processing plants, day-care centres, and counselling centres.<sup>74</sup> Joining with the WSL and other groups in overtly political actions in the late 1920s, Oku's consumer group sowed the seeds for the suffragists' turn to consumer issues in the mid-1930s, when other forms of civic participation, especially suffragism, were repressed.

Things looked promising for women's civil rights in the second half of 1928, ushering in a 'period of hope.' The Seiyūkai and Minseitō parties vied with one another to introduce bills for women's civil rights, though each limited those rights to suffrage at the local level.<sup>75</sup> In December, the WSL brought together thirteen Tokyo-based women's groups and pounded the pavement gathering signatures for a civil rights petition to

the Home Minister. They ultimately got 20,000, gathering 4,329 on one day in January alone.<sup>76</sup> With some expectation of success, Ichikawa led a group of women to the Diet on 7 February 1929. On the agenda for that day were several proposals for amending the City Code and the Town and Village Code. Two hundred seventy Diet members (146 in the Seiyūkai, 103 in the Minseitō, and 21 others) – well over a majority – had claimed to support one of the civil rights bills.<sup>77</sup> But as the politicians began to debate the issues, the prospects for passage dimmed, and the amendments failed to make it out of committee before the Diet adjourned.

The suffragists had a more sympathetic government to work with a few months later. Hamaguchi Osamu and his cabinet, who came into office on 2 July 1929, sought cooperation with women's groups who, in turn, demanded recognition of their public role by being given rights. Hamaguchi's economic plans called for women's cooperation. Suffragists saw this as an opportunity to demand citizenship rights. At the September meeting with members of Hamaguchi's cabinet, they announced that they 'would like to be given rights as a reward for cooperation. We request a public commitment to women's rights.'<sup>78</sup> Even the usually dismissive *Tokyo asahi shinbun* editorialized on 29 September that women's status should be raised because they were consumers.<sup>79</sup>

Hamaguchi did not disappoint. In December he gave a speech at Japan Women's University (Nihon Joshi Daigaku) stating it was time to grant women rights so that they could reform consumption, clean up politics, and carry out moral education<sup>80</sup> – a gender-stereotyped agenda to be sure, but one which called for civil rights. Hamaguchi's clear advocacy of rights was motivated as much by politics as by ideology. Because even the Seiyūkai supported some form of civil rights, the more liberal Minseitō had to respond.

Following the general election of February 1930, the Minseitō held onto its dominant parliamentary position.<sup>81</sup> There were now 338 probable supporters of some form of women's rights in the new Diet.<sup>82</sup> After the elections, the WSL's central committee sat down to plot strategy in early March, and agreed unanimously to call a National Women's Suffrage Convention on 27 April.<sup>83</sup> Delegates to the first Convention came from 19 prefectures and metropolitan areas as well as Manchuria. They represented various groups, including the sponsors of the convention – the WSL – and the supporters – the Japan Women's Suffrage Association (connected to the WRS), the All-Kansai Federation, the Proletarian Women's League, the Young Women's Buddhist Association, the Japanese YWCA, and the National Association of Women Elementary School Teachers. Speeches were given by suffragists, bureaucrats, party politicians, and representatives of women's groups, and poet Yosano Akiko's composition, '*Fusen no uta*' (The song of women's rights), was sung by noted soprano Ogino Ayako. Swept up in the enthusiasm of the moment, one Minseitō politician declared, 'My colleagues and I would consider it a great



accomplishment . . . to grant women equal political rights in local elections.<sup>84</sup> Even feminists who normally second-guessed politicians' statements of support were hopeful. More than 400 delegates left on an upbeat note, and Kubushiro enthused to Ichikawa that the meeting was like Seneca Falls.<sup>85</sup>

In May, the House of Representatives passed a bill to amend the City Code and Town and Village Code, which would have granted women political equality with men on the local level.<sup>86</sup> As expected, the bill failed in the more conservative House of Peers. Rumours began circulating that the women's rights legislation would be watered down to help secure its passage in the next Diet session. In mid-July 1930, the home minister had developed compromise proposals limiting women's local rights.<sup>87</sup> Under the terms, only women over thirty would be considered competent to exercise political rights. Although permitted to vote in elections, they would not be eligible to run for city, town, or village office without their husbands' approval. And the right to vote for (and run for office as) members of prefectural assemblies was not included.

The previous month, *Fusen* had solicited comments about limited rights from seven prominent women, including leftist Yamakawa Kikue, Dr. Takeuchi Shigeyo, proletarian novelist Hirabayashi Taiko, and the All-Kansai Federation's Onda Kazuko. All expressed their '*zettai ni hantai*' (absolute opposition – Yamakawa), '*daihantai*' (great opposition – Onda), or some other form of strong opposition. Limited rights drew the ire of notable activists across the spectrum, with the important exception of the more conservative Society of Like-Minded Women.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, the government introduced severely compromised bills. On 10 February 1931, 200 women from the WSL witnessed the government's introduction of a bill for limited local rights.<sup>89</sup> The debate in the Lower House indicated that many Diet members were more interested in the well being of their parties rather than the promotion of rights. Eventually, a compromise bill was approved by the Lower House on 28 February and sent to the House of Peers. This bill was encumbered by a rider proposing a lowering of the age for male civil rights, which made the Upper House's approval of a bill already in fragile condition even less likely.<sup>90</sup> The bill survived debate in committee in the Upper House, but it was solidly defeated on the floor (62 for, 184 against). The Manchurian Incident of September 1931 put an end even to the limited local rights bills. Women did not give up on the demand for suffrage rights just yet, nor did they abandon other forms of feminist civic participation. But their options were increasingly limited.

### **Citizenship, subjecthood, or cooperation (1931–37)**

The WSL and other suffragist women's groups continued to hold National Women's Suffrage Conventions until 1937, hopeful that their collaboration would present united women's positions on some of the key issues of

the day, and in the end, expand the scope of women's civil rights. In February 1931, as the government was debating the limited bill of rights, the Second National Women's Suffrage Convention demanded that women be given full suffrage rights.

Despite the intensification of Japanese militarism with the Manchurian Incident in September 1931, several women's groups continued to demand the vote. Women, as mothers, Ichikawa wrote in November 1931, would be more likely to prevent war and, thus, should be given the ballot.<sup>91</sup> In January 1932, the Proletarian Women's League joined the WSL and two other liberal suffrage groups in a collaborative organization, the *Fusen Dantai Rengō Inkai* (Joint Committee of Women's Suffrage Groups), in preparation for the Third National Women's Suffrage Convention. The tenor of that Convention, held in May, was antiwar. Although some argued that economically depressed and resource-poor Japan needed to go into Manchuria, others condemned the invasion. The Convention members linked women's suffrage to finding a way out of Japan's crisis situation. In addition, socialist Kondō Magara proposed a unanimously adopted resolution, which read: 'As women, we voice our firm opposition to the forces of fascism which are gaining momentum in the present time.'<sup>92</sup> These were not idle words. The March issue of the WSL journal, *Fusen*, had been banned by the government for its antiwar stance.

The political climate for women's rights deteriorated in the next twelve months. Many of the socialist suffragists had suffered stints in prison in the preceding two years, and their voices were increasingly silenced. The liberal feminist movement was under surveillance, especially those who condemned military expansionism. A wave of right-wing terrorism emerged. Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi, who had expressed interest in women's rights, was assassinated in May 1932, and the Saitō Makoto cabinet that succeeded him was opposed to women's rights. In March 1933, Japan left the League of Nations when it was condemned for the creation of the puppet state of Manchukuo. The Fourth Convention took place shortly thereafter. The conveners had hoped to pass a resolution opposing military spending, which had reached 40 per cent of Japan's total national budget, but had to settle for compromised wording calling only for arms limitation, as the Social Democratic Women's League saw Japan's role in Manchuria as legitimate.<sup>93</sup> The following year, the Fifth Convention supported resolutions for peace, support of families of soldiers injured in the war, cooperation with women around the world in the name of peace, and mother-child protection. At the Sixth Convention, members called on the government to give women the vote so they might help in this time of 'emergency.' In spite of this call for the vote, many suffragists had begun to soft-pedal the demand for political rights by combining it with other issues.

Although Ichikawa Fusae continued her quest for full citizenship rights, she and other suffragists increasingly involved themselves in causes that

were closely related to those Oku Mumeo and the consumer activists had championed a few years earlier. These causes were an expression of civic participation in themselves, and would, suffragists believed, accustom women to political activities when they received the vote. They included setting up watchdog organizations to expose electoral bribery and corruption, conducting public education campaigns among housewives to improve garbage removal and sanitation, opposing hikes in the price of home fuels, and pressuring the Tokyo municipal government to increase competition in the wholesale food markets.<sup>94</sup> Suffragists adopted the cause of maternal and child welfare, long advocated by socialist feminists, and saw their work bear fruit. The Mother and Child Protection Act, which gave monetary assistance to single mothers of children under age 13, was passed in 1937 and went into effect on 1 January 1938. While this law helped women and their children who were in dire need, it also 'reinforced ... an unequal relationship between women and the state, with women positioned as weak supplicants in need of "protection."' <sup>95</sup> Suffragists' work on behalf of this law, while certainly admirable in its compassion, supported women in their subjecthood rather than their citizenship. The Seventh (and final) Convention in May 1937 called for women's participation in government in order to protect the livelihoods of the Japanese people. Again, it was desire to protect suffering subjects that produced this resolution.

Full-scale warfare between Japan and China began in July 1937, and the government accelerated efforts to mobilize society spiritually, materially, and militarily. In light of those efforts, and fearful of government surveillance, eight women's groups, including the major suffragist groups, created the Federation of Japanese Women's Organizations (*Nihon Fujin Dantai Renmei*). In lieu of holding a National Women's Suffrage Convention in 1938, these eight, plus a dozen other groups, held a Women's National Emergency Congress.<sup>96</sup> Rather than calling for women's civic participation as a way of promoting a peaceful resolution to Japan's domestic and international problems, as had the earlier Women's Suffrage Conventions, this Convention now called for women's participation to support the government. In that climate, an independent women's movement could no longer exist, and the Women's Suffrage League, like other women's groups, disbanded in September 1940. The WSL was, in many ways, the flagship of the movement for full citizenship rights, and its demise signalled the end of feminists' pursuit of civic participation as a marker of full citizenship until after World War II. Women, like men, would be included as subjects, not citizens, under the mantle of the state throughout the war. But the ground had been prepared since the Meiji period for women's full citizenship rights, and within ten days of Japan's surrender in August 1945, Ichikawa and other suffragist feminists began to organize to claim full rights in the post-war reconstruction of the state and society. When women voted for the first time in April 1946, the turnout

was unexpectedly high (67 per cent of women voted), and 39 women were elected to the Diet. Equality in Japan, as elsewhere, is a continuing struggle, but the notion that women and men are equally entitled to citizenship and its reification in the ballot have been achieved.

## Notes

- 1 The term 'feminism' (*feminizumu*) was introduced in Japan in a 1910 article in *Hōgaku Kyōkai Zasshi*. In this chapter, the term will be used to refer to a broad range of discourses, beginning in the early Meiji period, which supported women's rights or the improvement of women's condition or status. See Sōgō Joseishi Kenkyūkai (ed.), *Nihon josei no rekishi*, Tokyo, 1993, pp. 192–3.
- 2 See, e.g., Y. Miyake, 'Doubling Expectations,' in G. Bernstein (ed.), *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- 3 On USA nationality law, see J. Freeman, 'The Revolution for Women in Law and Public Policy,' in J. Freeman (ed.), *Women: A Feminist Perspective*, Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing, 1995, pp. 369–70; on Japanese nationality law, see K. Kinjo, 'Legal Changes to the Status Quo,' in K. Fujimura-Fanselow and A. Kameda, *Japanese Women: New Feminist Perspectives on the Past, Present, and Future*, New York: Feminist Press, 1995, p. 356.
- 4 J. Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991, p. 2.
- 5 Ichikawa Fusae, 'Fujin sanseiken undō no fujin undō ni okeru chii,' *Fujin kōron*, 10 (March) 1925, p. 36. Ichikawa wrote suffrage was the shortcut to women's liberation.
- 6 B. Molony, 'Women's Rights, Feminism, and Suffragism in Japan, 1870–1925,' *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 69, 4, 2000, 643–5.
- 7 *Kokumin* was one of several terms translated as 'citizen' in the Meiji era. For an insightful commentary on the terms used at that time, see A. Hirai, 'State and Ideology in Meiji Japan – A Review Article,' *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 46, 1987, 89–103.
- 8 B. Molony, 'Women and the State in Modern Japan: Feminist Discourses in the Meiji and Taishō Eras,' in J. Hunter (ed.), *Japan: State and People in the Twentieth Century*, London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 1999, pp. 32–8.
- 9 B. Molony, 'Women's Rights, Feminism, and Suffragism,' p. 643.
- 10 B. Molony, 'Equality versus Difference: The Japanese Debate over "Motherhood Protection," 1915–1950,' in J. Hunter (ed.), *Japanese Women Working*, London and New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 122–48; B. Molony, 'Japan's 1986 Equal Employment Opportunity Law and the Changing Discourse on Gender,' *Signs*, vol. 20, 2, 1995, 268–302.
- 11 S. Nolte and S. Hastings, 'The Meiji State's Policy toward Women, 1890–1910,' in G. Bernstein (ed.), *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, p. 156; Ichikawa Fusae, *Ichikawa Fusae Jiden – senzenhen*, Tokyo: Shinjuku Shobō, 1974.
- 12 V. Mackie, *Creating Socialist Women: Gender, Labour, and Activism, 1900–1937*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 131.
- 13 Working for special protections while simultaneously demanding equality in civil rights was a frequent tactic of feminist movements throughout the world. Pragmatism was common, even if consistency of approach may not have been. As Mackie notes, however, this approach was problematic, as it 'unwittingly reinforced the notion that the normal relationship between the State and individual women is one of "protector" and "protected."' Ibid., p. 92.

- 14 For a detailed analysis of the proposed legislation, see S. Otsubo, 'Engendering Eugenics: Feminist and Marriage Restriction Legislation in the 1920s,' in B. Molony and K. Uno (eds), *Gendering Modern Japanese History*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.
- 15 The NWA was not the first group to seek repeal of the provisions of Article 5 that limited women's ability to participate in politics. Socialist women had initiated parliamentary lobbying between 1904 and 1909, submitting petitions that persuaded a majority of the House of Representatives to partially revise Article 5. Opposition in the House of Peers doomed the measure at that time. Mackie, *op. cit.*, pp. 62–5.
- 16 'Fujimura Yoshirō-shi no chikei kaikan hantairon hihan,' *Josei dōmei*, 8 (May) 1921, 5.
- 17 Hiratsuka Raichō, 'Shakai kaizō ni taisuru fujin no shimei,' *Josei dōmei*, 1 (October) 1920, 10.
- 18 Ichikawa Fusae, 'Chian keisatushō dai-go jō shūsei (1),' *Josei dōmei*, 1 (October) 1920, 24.
- 19 On the Red Wave Society, see Mackie, *op. cit.*, pp. 102–5; M. Hane, *Reflections of the Way to the Gallows: Rebel Women in Prewar Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988, Chapter 5; Esashi Akiko, *Sameyō onnatachi*, Tokyo: Daigetsu Shōten, 1980; and Watanabe Etsuji and Suzuki Yūko, *Tatakai ni ikite*, Tokyo: Domesu, 1980, Chapter 1.
- 20 Yamakawa Kikue's May Day manifesto, cited in M. Hane, *op. cit.*, pp. 126–7.
- 21 Yamakawa Kikue, 'Shin Fujin Kyōkai to Sekirankai,' *Taiyō*, 27 (July) 1921, 135–7.
- 22 Alice Paul, founder of the National Woman's Party, was known as a single-minded advocate of women's citizenship rights to the exclusion of other feminist agendas. Ichikawa Fusae, 'Arisu Poru no inshō,' *Fusen*, vol. 4, 8, 1930, reprinted in Ichikawa Fusae, *Nonaka no ippon sugi*, Tokyo: Shinjuku Shobō, 1981, pp. 32–3.
- 23 Oku Mumeo, *Akekure*, Tokyo: Daviddosha, 1957, pp. 27–8.
- 24 Kondō Magara, *Watashi no kaisō, ge, Sekirankai to watashi*, Tokyo: Domesu, 1981, pp. 136–9.
- 25 Wakita Haruko, Hayashi Reiko, and Nagahara Kazuko (eds), *Nihon joseishi*, Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1986, p. 247.
- 26 Suzuki Yūko, 'Kondō Magara shōron,' concluding essay in Kondō Magara, *Watashi no kaisō, ge*, 1981, pp. 216–17.
- 27 Oku Mumeo, quoted by Suzuki Yūko, *op. cit.*, p. 216.
- 28 Izuma Tsuko, 'Fusen jishshi no kekka o yososhite,' in Ichijima Kenkichi (ed.), *Fusen mondai to fujin no yōkyū*, Bunmei Kyōkai, 1929, p. 120.
- 29 For more on the WRS, see S.L. Sievers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983, Chapter 5.
- 30 Kirisutokyo Fujin Kyōfukai (eds), *Nihon Kirisutokyo Fujin Kyōfukai hyakunen shi*, Tokyo: Domesu, 1986, pp. 512–13.
- 31 *Ibid.*, pp. 514–16.
- 32 G. Pflugfelder, *Seiji to daidokoro: Akita ken joshi sanseiken undōshi*, Tokyo: Domesu, 1986, pp. 75–80.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- 34 Ōdera Emiko, 'Shūfusō to shōhi kumiai undō,' *Rekishi hyōron*, 410 (June) 1984, 38.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 36 Saji Emiko, 'Oku Mumeo to musan katei fujin,' *Rekishi hyōron*, 359 (March) 1980, 59.

- 37 Fujime Yuki, 'Zen Kansai Fujin Rengōkai no kōzō to tokushitsu,' *Shiron*, vol. 71, 6, 1988, 71–2. See also Sheldon Garon, 'Women's Groups and the Japanese State: Contending Approaches to Political Integration, 1890–1945,' *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 91, 1, 1993, 8–9, 27–8.
- 38 Fujime, op. cit., pp. 75–8.
- 39 Ibid., p. 75.
- 40 Ibid., p. 85. See also her footnote 10, p. 96, for a list of WSL branches founded by members of the All-Kansai Federation.
- 41 Ibid., p. 97.
- 42 Kaneko Shigeri, *Fujin mondai no chishiki*, Tokyo: Hibonkaku, 1934, p. 218; Chino Yōichi, *Kindai Nihon fujin kyōikushi*, Tokyo: Domesu, 1979, p. 242.
- 43 Cited in Kirisutokyō Fujin Kyōfukai, pp. 526–7; see also Ichikawa, *Ichikawa Fusae Jiden*, op. cit., 144.
- 44 Kubushiro, cited in Ichikawa, *Ichikawa Fusae Jiden*, p. 145.
- 45 Ichikawa, *Ichikawa Fusae Jiden*, op. cit., p. 150.
- 46 Ibid., p. 150; Yoshimi Kaneko, *Fujin sanseiken*, Tokyo: Kajima Kenkyūjo, 1971, p. 155.
- 47 Kirisutokyō Fujin Kyōfukai, op. cit., p. 528.
- 48 For more on the activities of Diet supporters, see Murata Shizuko, 'Daigishi Yamaguchi Masaji to fujin sanseiken undō,' *Rekishi hyōron*, 517 (May) 1993, 83–99.
- 49 S. Nolte, 'Women's Rights and Society's Needs: Japan's 1931 Suffrage Bill,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 28, 41, 1986, 707–8, summarizes a variety of arguments.
- 50 Ichikawa, *Ichikawa Fusae Jiden*, op. cit., p. 155. It is believed that legal expert Hozumi Shigeto was the first to use the word *fusen* to apply to women in 1924. See 'Fusen mondai,' *Fusen*, 1 (March) 1927, p. 10.
- 51 Fujime, op. cit., p. 84.
- 52 Ibid., pp. 97–100.
- 53 *Katei kumiai geppō*, vol. 39, 12, 1922, quoted in Ōdera, op. cit., p. 34.
- 54 K. Uno, 'Women and Changes in the Household Division of Labor,' in G. Bernstein (ed.), *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600–1945*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, pp. 17–41; Nolte and Hastings, op. cit.
- 55 Ōdera, op. cit., p. 27.
- 56 Oku Mumeo, 'Seikō Nakano e utsurisumu,' in *Fujin undō* (October 1926), quoted in Saji, op. cit., p. 62.
- 57 Saji, op. cit., p. 67.
- 58 Ibid., p. 71; Odera Emiko, op. cit., pp. 41–4.
- 59 Mackie, op. cit., pp. 131–50, has an excellent, detailed analysis of the complicated history of numerous women's groups affiliated with socialist parties.
- 60 Takahashi Kikue, 'Ichikawa sensei to Kyōfukai,' in Ichikawa Fusae to Iu Hito Kankōkai Hen (eds), *Ichikawa Fusae to iu hito: 100-nin no kaisō*, Tokyo: Shinjuku Shobō, 1982, p. 325.
- 61 Tajima Hide, *Hitosuji no michi: fujin kaihō no tataakai gojūnen*, Tokyo: Aoki Sahoten, 1968, pp. 112–13.
- 62 Another area in which feminism was a unifying ideology was the birth control movement. In the late 1920s feminist women and men of a wide variety of political opinions joined together in cooperative movements. Both middle-class and proletarian groups had established birth control clinics in the 1920s; in 1931, these people created the Japan Birth Control League, whose members included Ishimoto Shizue, Hiratsuka Raichō, Kaneko Shigeri, Kawasaki Natsu, Niizuma Itoko, Akamatsu Tsuneko, and women from the YWCA, WRS, WSL, and socialist organizations. Male feminist Majima Kan, who believed that birth

- control was the key to 'women's liberation from slavery under men,' founded the League. H. Hopper, *A New Woman of Japan: A Political Biography of Katō Shidzue*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1996, Chapter 3; Margi Haas, 'The First Birth Control Movement in Japan, 1902–1937,' MA dissertation, Harvard University, 1975, p. 39.
- 63 Prefectural assembly elections under universal manhood suffrage had taken place in 1927, but as Ichikawa noted, the outcome would not influence women's civil rights so the WSL did not actively campaign at that time. See Fu [Ichikawa Fusae], 'Fu-ken kaigiin no senkyo to fusen,' *Fusen*, vol. 1, 8, 1927.
- 64 Ichikawa, *Ichikawa Fusae Jiden* op. cit., p. 169. See also Ichikawa Fusae, 'Fusen e no sekkin,' *Fujin kōron*, 13 (March) 1928, 3; Mizuno Shikiko, 'Fusen wa kagi nari,' in Tanaka Sumiko (ed.), *Kindai Nihon no joseizō*, Tokyo: Shakai Shisōsha, 1968, p. 123.
- 65 Kaneko Shigeri, 'Nihon fusen undō shōshi,' in Ichijima Kenkichi (ed.), *Fusen mondai to fujin no yōkyū*, Tokyo: Bunmei Kyōkai, 1929, p. 98.
- 66 Oku Mumeo's comment originally appeared in *Tōkyō asahi shinbun* and is quoted in Ichikawa Fusae, *Watakushi no fujin undō*, Tokyo: Akimoto Shobō, 1972, p. 104.
- 67 Yoshino Sakuzō, 'Ichikawa Fusae ni ateta Yoshino Sakuzō no tegami,' in Ichikawa Fusae (ed.), *Nihon fujin mondai shiryō shūsei*, vol. 2, *Seiji*, Tokyo: Domesu Shuppan, 1976–80, p. 289.
- 68 G. Totten, *The Social Democratic Movement in Prewar Japan*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966, pp. 414–16.
- 69 Ichikawa, *Ichikawa Fusae Jiden*, op. cit., p. 171.
- 70 'Fusen Kakutoku Kyōdō Iinkai no ki,' *Fujin Sansei Dōmei kaihō*, vol. 4, 1928, 5–10.
- 71 'Shin gikai ni taishite no kyōdō undō o musan fujin dantai ni teishō,' reprinted in Ichikawa Fusae (ed.), *Nihon fujin mondai shiryō shūsei*, vol. 2, *Seiji*, Tokyo: Domesu Shuppan, 1976–80, p. 290.
- 72 Kodama Katsuko, 'Kantō Fujin Dōmei to Fusen Kakutoku Kyōdō Iinkai ni tsuite,' *Rekishi hyōron*, 299 (March) 1975, 39.
- 73 Oku Mumeo, 'Katei fujin to shite no hansei,' *Fujin undō* (May 1928), cited in Odera Emiko, op. cit., p. 41.
- 74 *Fujin undō* (February 1929), cited in Saji Emiko, op. cit., p. 70.
- 75 Ichikawa, *Ichikawa Fusae Jiden*, op. cit., p. 187.
- 76 Ichikawa, *Ichikawa Fusae Jiden*, op. cit., p. 188; Pflugfelder, op. cit., p. 101.
- 77 Kaneko, *Fujin mondai no chishiki*, op. cit., p. 228.
- 78 Ichikawa, *Ichikawa Fusae Jiden*, op. cit., p. 211.
- 79 Saji, op. cit., p. 4.
- 80 Ibid., pp. 6–7.
- 81 Ichikawa Fusae, 'Fusen dainiji sōsenkyō hihan,' *Fusen*, vol. 4, 3, 1930, 6–11.
- 82 Kodama, op. cit., p. 83.
- 83 Ichikawa, *Ichikawa Fusae Jiden*, pp. 218–19.
- 84 Ichikawa, *Ichikawa Fusae Jiden*, p. 225.
- 85 Kodama, op. cit., p. 84.
- 86 *Fusen*, vol. 4, 5, 1930, 44–71, made an exhaustive, transcript-like report on the debate of the 58th Diet on women's rights available to its readers.
- 87 Ichikawa, *Ichikawa Fusae Jiden*, op. cit., pp. 244–5.
- 88 'Seigen kōminken'an o dō miru?' *Fusen*, vol. 4, 7, 1930, 10–11.
- 89 Ichikawa Fusae, 'Seigen fujin kōminken'an no hiketsusareru made,' *Fusen*, vol. 5, 4, 1931, 6.
- 90 Saji, op. cit., p. 20.
- 91 Ichikawa Fusae, 'Dai 60 gikai to fusen an,' *Fusen*, vol. 5, 11, 1931, 2–3.

- 92 Nishikawa Yūko, 'Japan's Entry into War and the Support of Women,' *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal, English Supplement*, vol. 12, 1997, 53.
- 93 *Ibid.*, pp. 53–4.
- 94 Ichikawa Fusae, 'Senkyō no jōka to fusen,' *Fusen*, 6, 7, 1932, 6–7; Ichikawa Fusae, 'Jichisei e no fujin no kyōryoku,' *Fusen*, 7, 7, 1933, 5; Ichikawa Fusae, *Ichikawa Fusae Jiden*, op. cit., p. 323.
- 95 Mackie, op. cit., p. 147.
- 96 Nishikawa, op. cit., p. 58.

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## 7 Expanding their realm

### Women and public agency in colonial Korea

*Ken Wells*

There is no 'year of victory' for female suffrage in Korea. During the Japanese colonial occupation from 1910 to 1945, no Korean enjoyed more than limited and innocuous voting rights at local-body level, nor was there a male, let alone a female suffrage movement. Universal adult suffrage was granted as a matter of course to Koreans by the founding constitutions of the new states that were formed in the north and south of the Korean peninsula in 1948. But this year was not a turning point in women's political, economic, social or cultural history in either state.<sup>1</sup> Failed expectations that the economic growth under General Park Chung-Hee's presidency between 1961 to 1979, indebted as it was to increased female education and employment, would weaken patriarchal networks and undermine restrictions on women<sup>2</sup> not only warn us against technological determinism but prepare us for an even more enigmatic turn: the relative failure of genuine political democracy in South Korea in the 1990s to effect beneficial changes for women. Few improvements in their public influence have been won through democratic politics, the percentage of women elected at state and local levels is among the lowest in the world, and democratic liberalisation has facilitated greater male domination of party politics.<sup>3</sup> South Korea today is with some warrant described alternatively as an industrial patriarchy or a patriarchal democracy.

Whereas continuous use has been made since 1948 of the struggles led by men during the colonial past for national political causes, neither General Park Chung-Hee nor the erstwhile dissident leader Kim Young Sam, who was elected president in 1992, saw even symbolic utility in building on the women's movements for social equality, public participation and economic independence during this same past. This might not be a remarkable instance of the general lack of attention paid to women's history and experience but it is an ironic one, for the expansion of women into the traditional male public strongholds during the colonial period is one of the most profound changes in Korea's social order of the twentieth century. Women of all classes were witting and for the most part willing agents of this transformation, the potential of which is only now being tapped after several decades of active deferment.

In this chapter, I argue that despite there being no room for a women's suffrage movement in a colonial state where men themselves had no vote, it was during this period that Korean women made decisive gains in precisely those areas that are generally believed to stem from the acquisition of political rights: personal freedom, economic independence and social influence. The turning point of the twentieth century in Korean women's struggle for public agency came in the 1920s and 1930s through non-political action, in particular through expansion of education among women of all classes and participation in the new urban economy of the time, which required stepping out of the confines of the traditional domestic sphere. I argue that it was partly as a consequence of their lack of political opportunity that women in the colonial period expanded their activities into the public realm as much as they did. There was some pressure on women to link their struggle for social rights and influence beyond the family to overtly political movements, and here I will also examine the relation between some women activists and socialist movements. But before embarking on these elements of the women's movements, I will turn to the question of suffrage itself.

### **The suffrage question**

The idea of voting rights, for men, arose in relation to the 1896–8 Independence Club's partially successful campaign for members of the Privy Council to be voted in by select males. However, the idea died with the Club, which had been maliciously accused of planning to overthrow the monarchy and replace it with a republic, and it was not until the Government-General provided for limited elections at local government level following the 1919 March First uprising, that the idea resurfaced in any practical sense. But those limited groups of Korean men who were eligible to vote hardly sprang with any alacrity to take advantage of this opportunity, since there was no credit and considerable disapprobation to be gained by so doing. On a very few occasions, 'elections' took place among an exceedingly small minority of people, in secret, for positions in the Shanghai Provisional Government after 1919. The Shin'ganhoe, or united front organisation, held elections among its members from 1927 to 1931 for central and branch offices.

Women's suffrage was first considered by Koreans who went abroad. The nationalist Yun Ch'ihŏ encountered debate over the idea in the USA when his academic and religious mentor Warren Candler of Vanderbilt University denounced the women's suffrage movement in the late 1880s as 'ungodly.' Yun himself considered that there were already too many males voting in western democracies and that women simply should not be included. He thought the pro-suffrage American Women's Christian Temperance Union was unwisely confounding the proper moral influence of good women on a society with political voting rights.<sup>4</sup> In suspecting

negative moral effects from women voting, Yun held a position similar to Japan's Kiyoura Keigo in 1890.<sup>5</sup> It was not until five decades later that Yun was prepared to concede to women some direct political involvement, or at least participation in public affairs and liberation from discriminatory practices in marriage and household.<sup>6</sup>

By this stage, women were gaining electoral experience in social organisations such as the Tonguhoe from 1926 and in political associations such as the Kūnuhoe, the women's united front movement of 1927 to 1931. They had gained a good grasp of the suffrage movements around the world and their relation to the wider struggle for women's liberation.<sup>7</sup> The Korean women activists were aware that female suffrage was attained first in New Zealand in 1893, but they considered World War One as the real turning point on a more global scale. What is important, however, is that they recognised in the European and North American cases a sequential logic: women maintained industry while men were at war, thereby gaining economic power which in turn enhanced women's social status and that of their liberation movements to the point where governments in several countries approved female suffrage.<sup>8</sup> On this logic, quite apart from their colonial status, a Korean suffragist movement was not yet a practical consideration.

Kim Yun'gyōng, a leader in the Tonguhoe movement that trained its membership in and governed itself according to democratic processes, contributed much to the debate from a male perspective. In his view, espoused in the mid-1920s, the fundamental principle of the suffragist movements was that 'a woman, too, is a person who has freedom,' and that women should possess the same trappings of freedom as do men, and to the same degree as men. In a society that exists necessarily of both men and women, he argued, it was natural that they should share equal rights, and so the fact that so far men only had possessed the right to vote was a patent anomaly. He recognised that in countries that had instituted male suffrage, there was a long period in which only certain men had the right, and that this right was attached to economic position and social status. Yet discrimination against non-propertied men was attacked successfully on the basis of the fundamental equality of men at birth and their equal potential, and this was reinforced by the expansion of education among the lower classes. Exactly the same principles of equality were then applied to women, with the result that female suffrage eventually won through, although not until a suffrage movement struggled for it.<sup>9</sup>

Kim went on to describe the women's suffrage struggles in various countries in Europe and North America. He pointed to the militant suffragists in Britain and the American Women's Rights Convention.<sup>10</sup> Kim also pointed out the central objections raised to female suffrage: that women's contributions to the state and even to society were indirect, whereas men exerted direct influence over political matters, and that due to the bearing and rearing of children, women had insufficient time to

gain experience in social and political matters and to cultivate their minds, and therefore were not equipped to vote in an informed manner.<sup>11</sup> It was against the Korean version of these beliefs that Korean women had to wage their own struggle. In his view, nothing could substitute for education at this stage.

The cosmopolitan, international dimension of women's suffrage did not pass Korea by entirely. The Swede, Ellen Key's popularity in Japan and Korea is reasonably well known, and indeed also figured in Kim Yun'gyōng's writings. Aletta Jacobs and Carrie Chapman Catt, founders of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance in 1902, included Korea and Japan in their extensive tour of some nine Asian countries in the 1910s, but the visit was perhaps a mite early and left little imprint on the peninsula.<sup>12</sup>

The situation for women in Japan was of course germane to the debate in colonial Korea. The Japanese case, however, provided scant encouragement. Japanese women were

prohibited from sponsoring or attending political meetings until 1922, nor were they able to join political parties before the end of the Second World War. In social terms, as well, the government mobilized its centralized education system to prepare girls to become the 'good wives and wise mothers' so essential to the nation's strength, prosperity, and moral well-being.<sup>13</sup>

Korean women were well aware of this unequal status of women in the land of their imperial masters. Lee In, a contributor to the cultural journal *Pyōlgŏn'gon*, described in some detail the legislative discriminations against women in Japan, from political to marital and even moral, regarding chastity, for instance.<sup>14</sup>

In Korea, interest in the topic of women's suffrage was perforce hardly more than academic.<sup>15</sup> The understanding of women's suffrage movements elsewhere was, in any case, that education of women and their entry into the urban workforce and professions was a precondition of participation in political processes. Accordingly, the principal practical vehicle women chose to gain entry to the public domain was education, believing that through knowledge they could attain economic independence and promote their causes through participation in the written media. In their pursuit of education and public recognition generally, a perhaps unusually high proportion of influential Korean women turned to Christianity, not simply because they could not resort to political solutions but more because they regarded religion as more fundamental than politics in defining human relations and behaviour.

### Setting the stage: education and religion

In what some might call an accident of history, construction of a new, modernised education system in Korea, unlike in Japan, fell into the hands of Protestant missionaries and their Korean converts. For women, this had far-reaching consequences that are still active in contemporary South Korean society. The revolutionary integration of females into an education structure at all levels and the fact that female missionaries, often unmarried, established and managed schools in the same non-domestic social space as males and with apparent equal rights, proved an enormous inspiration to girls and young women.

In order to grasp the importance Korean women placed on religion it is necessary to understand their traditional relation to religion. In Chosŏn Korea, from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, religion was not only the primary reference point for women, but was often their preserve, especially the classical traditions associated with shamanism. Their dominance in classical religious life was related to the official policy of gender segregation, whereby women were not supposed to participate directly or visibly outside the domestic realm.

There were two groups of women not obviously subject to Confucian gender norms: the *kisaeng* (women entertainers) and the shaman priestesses. The *kisaeng* were permitted to acquire a classical Chinese education and to move in the company of men. But they posed no threat to either the Confucian family ideology or the patriarchal structure of society. Quite the contrary: they buttressed Confucian harmony and served the interests of patriarchy. The *kisaengs'* access to education was to equip them for conversation with high-class males, who could enjoy a level of discussion or refined exchange with the *kisaeng* that they seldom could with their wives, quite apart from exchanging amorous letters in classical poetic styles. The *kisaeng* were employed by men for men.

The institution and toleration of the *kisaeng* were a concession to universal male weakness. And so the struggle for female recognition outside the domestic sphere had to address the discriminatory sexual morality of the traditional order. The *kisaeng*, further, had been made more acceptable to the Chosŏn dynasty's moral sensibilities by their relegation to the Ch'ŏnin class, the lowest class, to which slaves and shaman priestesses belonged. The idea behind conferring the lowest social status to both *kisaeng* and shaman was to check any possible ambition by a female who had education or public functions to exercise social and political power. The moral import of this status was that the functions of *kisaeng* and shamans were questionable or vulgar.

The ramifications of the shamans' low status are worth considering a little further. First, it clearly indicated that shamanism (and indeed, religion in general) was deemed to be ignoble and a feature of ignorant, superstitious commoners. The official position was that shamanism ought

to be eradicated. Several measures were enacted for this purpose, such as abolishing certain shamanic rituals and festivals in towns and, at times, removing all shamans from Seoul, the capital. Confucian purists at times lamented that shamanism still held sway over the popular mind, but its persistence was partly a consequence of the fact that nobles and even kings themselves continued to call upon shamans' services in times of serious illness, damaging droughts, and threats to the kingdom.<sup>16</sup>

Second, because women predominantly presided over shamanism, officially vulgar or contemptible beliefs and practices naturally became associated with females – indeed, with femaleness, the dark side, the *yin*. This encouraged a gender division in terms of religion, or one's view of how things in life fit together. Dubbing shamanism a superstitious view of life reinforced the already strong patriarchal principle of the inferiority of women in matters of rational thought and of their unfitness for participation in determining public affairs. This is an important point, because the early enlightenment movements of the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries also branded shamanism as superstition, and interpreted women's involvement in it as a feature of the general degradation of women in traditional society.

Third, in dismissing shamanism as the business of women and ignorant commoners, the aristocracy, literati and ruling stratum paid little attention to it. The corollary of this was that a great deal of the real life and activities of almost all Korean women fell outside both the Confucian view of the world and the high-class males' knowledge. Although this division of life was very much an effect of Confucian practice in Chosŏn Korea, it was, paradoxically, the reason why shamanism and a host of other traditional Korean beliefs and customs were able to survive. Had the gender division been less strict, had male and female shared more in public and even family life, it is likely that shamanism would have been subjected to much more thorough attempts to eradicate it from domestic and village life.

But there are other factors. Unlike in China, where there was considerable horizontal extension of the family system, Korea applied the hierarchical principle far more assiduously, so that cohabitation of married sons was not regarded as ideal. Chosŏn Korea's primogeniture laws induced hierarchical relations among brothers. The first son was very important: he inherited the family property; he was responsible for his parents' welfare during their lives and after their death; his son was the next principal heir, and so on. The wife of the first son likewise had to be careful to observe the Confucian codes and rituals in service of her parents-in-law and husband. Younger sons were subject to fewer constraints and less scrutiny. Their wives normally lived apart from the mother-in-law and tended even in relatively high-class society to maintain traditional religious practices and associated beliefs, passing these on to their children. In this way, due to the particular Korean extended family system, a considerable



body of non-Confucian tradition was preserved down the generations by the wives of younger sons.

The introduction of a 'scientific' view through modern education from the 1890s and its prevalence throughout the colonial period was therefore a matter of considerable moment in modern Korean women's history. Such a view, reinforcing even while replacing the Chosŏn categories of irrationality and superstition, further downgraded shamanism, the area of women's greatest social input hitherto. The 'new women,' as they were immediately called, were the newly educated women, for whom liberation signified release from what had held them back and given them an inferior status to men, the chief villain of which was 'superstition.' The initial virtually unbreakable association between Christianity and the new education and new aspirations for women was therefore of immense importance.

The case of Kim Hwallan (1899–1970) of the first generation of educated Protestant new women and later founder of the renowned Ewha Women's University in Seoul, illustrates the importance of the connection perfectly. In her autobiography, Kim recounted that her mother was very religious and followed animist practices of placating household spirits. But she noted (and I employ her expressions and viewpoint), that her mother's 'religious life and thought were dominated by fear,' a fear that stemmed from an irrational spirituality that sought the reasons for life's vicissitudes in non-existent spirit forces.<sup>17</sup> Protestant Christianity cleared this away with its rational spirituality, that is, its ascription of natural causes to natural events, its teaching of the ethical character of human choices and behaviour, and its belief in the transformative power of a single divinity that created the natural order and its laws and human beings and their spiritual personhood. Through her mother, who was herself converted by a visiting 'Bible woman,' a colporteur, Kim Hwallan's whole family converted to Christianity in the early 1900s, after which all the paraphernalia of her mother's animism and her father's ancestral tablets were burned in a home ceremony.<sup>18</sup>

For women, therefore, the nature of Protestant Christianity, the circumstances under which it was introduced and its association with a new, 'scientific' education system, afforded them the twin advantage of retaining their traditional adherence to a religious framework of life and discarding the negative historical associations that had encumbered their religious activities. In the late 1890s, the principle that the status of women was an index of the quality of a civilisation had been proclaimed repeatedly in the pages of Korea's first vernacular newspaper, the *Tongnip sinmun* (*The Independent*). Through the churches and the schools, the new Protestant women believed, Korean women would attain full status as citizens and gain the right and freedom to contribute their energy, wisdom and values to the life of their communities. Religion was also the means by which Korean women could build social capital through the family, a

necessary condition of stepping through the household gate into the school. Given the wholly domestic definition of women's roles, combined with the political distance of the colonial regime, it is natural that significant social change was initiated in households.<sup>19</sup>

After the conversion of her family to Christianity, the next 'revolutionary event' in Kim Hwallan's life as she recalled it was watching her elder sisters heading off to school.<sup>20</sup> Kim followed suit, and in 1918 graduated from the Methodist Ewha College (which in the late 1940s became Ewha Women's University under her presidency). In the process, a temporary division occurred within the family. Kim's father grew opposed to her continuing on to higher education, demanding that she marry and settle down instead. After some struggle, her mother took her side and won her father over. Kim recalls this as an illustration of negotiations within the household over female roles and functions that were widespread at the time. This victory paved the way for education abroad, leading to a Masters degree at Boston University in 1925, on 'The Relation between Philosophy and Religion.'<sup>21</sup>

There were of course several variants of the household strategies and their outcomes. In some cases negotiation failed. Im Yöngshin, founder after liberation of Chungang University in Seoul, was whipped by her father and finally fled her home in order to pursue education. Even in this case, however, it was the unfamiliar equal respect shown to females and encouragement of their new educational and social aspirations by a local Protestant pastor that spurred Im Yöngshin's rebellion, tacitly supported by her mother.<sup>22</sup>

In other cases, it was the father who backed a daughter's educational objectives. Kim Kwihyök (b. 1922), eldest of eight children in a family that embraced Christianity through the mother's influence, was sent when twelve to Sungüi Girls' School in P'yongyang by her father. Despite the father's stated principle that boys may progress to Special Schools (chönmun hakkyo) but girls should stop at high-school, it was he who took Kwihyök's side against her mother's wish that she get married. He allowed her to attend Ehwa Women's Special School in Seoul, where she topped her graduating class and received a Governor-General's award. Her three younger sisters followed suit, despite interruptions of war and the split into two states, graduating from the new tertiary institutions opened in Seoul after liberation from Japan.<sup>23</sup>

As female education expanded during the 1910s, a purposive solidarity emerged among alumni of the girls' schools. These alumni groups founded the patriotic women's associations and other similar groups that challenged traditional family and kinship structures. Many were responsible for female participation in the 1919 March First Movement. The repercussions on the women's movement of March First were many, but of major importance was the conscious shift away from compliance with the traditional view of femininity and female roles. This shift was reflected

in publications and in the actions of student, nationalist and socialist movements. Among the organisations which arose after 1919 were the Chosŏn Women's Education Association, the Women's Higher Education Mutual Assistance Society, the Seoul Young Women's Association, the YWCA, along with a Buddhist and a Ch'ŏndogyo Young Women's Society<sup>24</sup> and two socialist organisations, the Chosŏn Women's Tonguhoe and Seoul Young Women's League.<sup>25</sup>

On 4 September 1921, the Chosŏn Women's Education Association rang out a call to expand women's education and improve the social status of women. By the mid-1920s schools for girls and women had mushroomed. Protestants ran almost all secondary schools, with the exception of a limited number of government institutions. The YWCA under Kim Hwallan's leadership regarded the major challenge to be female education in the countryside. When travelling in 1928 to a Methodist Conference in Missouri and a meeting of the International Missionary Council in Jerusalem, she seized the opportunity to spend two weeks in Denmark, where she investigated the principles and practices of the Danish Folk High Schools, which the Korean YWCA and YMCA jointly planned to implement in Korea.<sup>26</sup>

On her return, she was joined by another university-educated Protestant leader, Pak Indŏk – who had distinguished herself by becoming the first woman to divorce her husband for infidelity under new laws introduced by the colonial authorities.<sup>27</sup> She also ran training classes for rural men and women of four to six weeks' duration, normally in winter for men and in spring for women. There are a number of reports on these rural schools, all of which point to their popularity and look forward to their rapid diffusion throughout the land. But this was not to be: four years later the Government-General Education Bureau ordered them to cease. A combination of factors probably accounts for their closure, but Kim Hwallan's rueful obituary tells part of the story: 'The success of this project was too much for the Japanese authorities to overlook.'<sup>28</sup> Under Kim and Pak's influence, the Kūnuhoe, or women's united front organisation, in 1929 gave top priority to rural women's education.

### **Women's work and the ideological rift**

With the growth in influence of socialism from the mid-1920s solidarity over education as the principal means of effecting change in the gender structure of Korean society began to break down. By 1930, a division arose between Protestant women and socialist women over the proper means and purpose of mobilising rural women, ironically at the very time Kim Hwallan had gone to New York to take up doctoral research into the regeneration of rural Korea. When Kim returned three years later, the united front experiment had already ended in failure and the ideological divide had hardened. Nevertheless, the energy of the women's educa-

tional activity had not abated, and the practice in some quarters of characterising the Korean women's movement in the 1930s in terms of ideological disunity over the political question of colonial rule depends on a narrow selection of cases and overall misconstrues the experiences of the women and their movements.

There was, to be sure, some division. A reflection of this divide appeared in the late 1920s in the novel *The Human Predicament*, written by Kang Kyŏngae, a Marxist, in which the idea of female solidarity was given very short shrift indeed.<sup>29</sup> This novel is structured around counterpositional social milieux, whose characters, male and female, are delineated as embodiments of rural impoverishment and servitude on the one hand, and exploitative urban greed and abuse of power on the other. The university-educated 'new woman' is portrayed as a counterfeit, one who is pre-occupied with the problems of 'free love' and oblivious of or callously contributing to the misery of her rural sisters and the new urban female factory workers. These latter were the real 'new women,' because they were creating for themselves a new social position in direct relation to the new political-economic forces sweeping over the land.<sup>30</sup>

Kang's novel was an expression of an overarching theory of human social and historical development, according to which class struggle was the engine of change in relation to which the 'woman' question was one integral component. There were no women's issues worthy of attention that were not linked to class issues; and no solution to women's problems that was not linked to solution of the class problem. More than this, class divisions between women were far too primary and strong to allow the formation of any gender solidarity among them. Although there must surely have been cases of active complicity by wealthier, educated women in the social and economic exploitation of rural and urban female labourers, where representation of the gender dynamics and struggles of the time are concerned it is a question whether Kang's realist portrayal of non-working-class 'new women' might not be more ideological construction than real. Evidence of gender solidarity across classes in colonial Korea does exist, and it needs to be recognised that there was a strong tendency among Korean activists on the left and the right to accuse women who devoted themselves to gender reform, especially where this implied opposition to male behaviour in family, marriage and sexual cultures, of weakening the struggle against imperialism.<sup>31</sup>

By the late 1920s, it is evident that socialist, or more specifically communist theories of the relationship between class and women's liberation were becoming known to educated Koreans, male and female. In journal articles, some application of the orthodox lines of Engels and Bebel and others were made to Korea's situation, albeit with the caveat that Korean women's consciousness had not yet risen sufficiently. For women with jobs, one left-leaning woman, Pak Noa wrote in 1930, the effect of capitalism was seen in the destruction of homes, hardship in daily lives flowing

into marriage and an increasing divorce-rate. Their work should have opened the door to their becoming independent citizens in society, for as western thinkers stated, women's liberation flowed from financial independence. But having been freed from housework and husband, women have found themselves fettered by a new master – capitalism. Ellen Key, she continued, pointed out that the loss amidst gain attending capitalism was too great, and Bebel's *Women and Socialism* and Rappaport's *Looking Forward* demonstrated that women's liberation could be actualised only through the liberation of the proletariat.<sup>32</sup>

This description of women and work, however, was drawn from claims about experiences in Europe. When she turned to her homeland, Pak Noa judged that Korean women were not aware of the enslaving properties of capitalism and so not prepared for the struggle against it. Once working women found suitable men to marry, with prospects of a livelihood, they quit their jobs and became 'parasites.' As for middle-school graduates, they were generally preoccupied with marrying a handsome, intelligent and wealthy man, and did not hesitate to become his fourth or fifth wife if he was wealthy enough. As 'new' housewives, while defying the old practice of maltreatment at the hands of husbands, they nevertheless became their husbands' puppets, eschewing enlightenment and employing servants. Education was undertaken simply with the object of marrying well.<sup>33</sup>

The question Pak raised concerned the reason for mobilising women for education and work. In her view the aim was to attain political power and influence public affairs. Hence the failure of working women to relate their entry into a new type of workforce (one which required them to step out of the domestic into the public realm) to radical political objectives revealed the irrelevance and even hostility of the newly educated women to the cause. Even though these 'new women' were the only ones in a position to rescue the 'old women' from their ignorance and slave-like lives, she complained, instead they despised and made fun of them. Confused and lost in the process of economic change, women rather than men had become the enemies of other women.<sup>34</sup>

Another writer, using the pen-name Sök Nam presented similar points, using standard socialist terminology, in a journal article also published in 1930. But again, the argument was a statement of theoretical lines developed in relation to European cases, where women's suffrage had been granted. The benefits of female suffrage, the article began, were limited to a certain class, the bourgeois. For proletarian women it worked as a disadvantage, such as in the case where bourgeois women used their new power to abolish prostitution, despite it being the capitalist economic system that coerced the proletarian women into prostitution.<sup>35</sup> At this point, the argument calls upon the Russian revolutionary experience, which is claimed to epitomise a necessary development of the women's struggle. The intensification of capitalist exploitation of women's labour

motivated female proletarian resistance, which ushered in a new direction, moving from campaigns for the equality of men and women to the struggle of the proletariat, designed to change the economic system, understanding that this and its related moral, customary and legal structures had to change first.<sup>36</sup>

Where did this leave the bourgeois women's movement? It remained meaningful insofar as it was historically inevitable, but this same historical reality had to lead to its counteraction when it became clear that it failed to embrace the interests of women as a whole. Thus in Korea, Sök Nam observed, there were still many women who thought that the women's movement was all about creating Ibsen's *Noras*, and many others who blindly followed bourgeois liberalism under the guise of patriotism. While it was necessary to adopt such things as part of a strategy, adherence to them in their own right was dangerous.<sup>37</sup>

In the wake of the dissolution of the Shin'ganhoe and Künuhoe in May 1931, Sök Nam's warning was taken a step further. The essential lesson of the dissolution for the relation of women's movements to the proletarian movement in Korea was that any organisation of a united body that ignored the distinct reality of class structure and that denied the hegemony of the proletariat hindered the progress of the class movement. The Künuhoe was fast fading from public memory due to the passivity of the *petit-bourgeoisie* within it, and now a change in direction was mandatory: no more tolerance for women's movements that were centred on the bourgeoisie.<sup>38</sup> Henceforth women's liberation had to be related wholly to class liberation.

As one might expect, given the very small proportion of women in a position to forward the socialist movement in comparison to men, this change of direction for Korean socialist women at least, only strengthened male domination of the debate over women's issues. The Korean experience bears comparison here with its counterpart in China. The men dominated the debate despite women's liberation being pronounced. Although again the predominance of trained male intellectuals was one reason for this, it has been suggested that another reason 'may be that female emancipation was used as a weapon directed as much toward destroying the existing society as for creating real independence for women.'<sup>39</sup>

Studies have shown that female interest in communism in Korea was concentrated among young, unmarried women, and principally because it offered them escape from arranged or forced early marriage.<sup>40</sup> Korean communists followed their Chinese counterparts in initially launching radical proposals for completely free love, marriage and divorce, as part of an attack on 'feudal' structures. Young women communists strongly supported this as an attack also on patriarchy. But the Chinese communist leadership discovered that radical gender policies invited 'antagonism, mistrust, and resentment among male peasants,' raised suspicion that

communism was bent on 'luring young women to abandon their virtue' and concluded that marriage reform 'threatened the class unity that was essential to its vision of rural revolution, since the family was a crucial unit of economic production and socialisation and women played the key role in reproducing family relations.' Accordingly, they abandoned calls for free marriage and divorce, lest this 'deprive male peasants of their two most valuable possessions – land and women.' For Korean communist women in Manchuria, where the movement was stronger and freer than anywhere else, the reversal was very abrupt, and 1934 marked the swing back to support of family harmony in the traditional sense.<sup>41</sup>

This reversal indicated to the Korean women that communists were prepared to use feminism as Lenin wanted to use nationalism, and when the object was achieved, or should women's objectives prove a hindrance, they were to be rejected as 'divisive.' Evidently, there was some anxiety about this possibility among left-leaning activists. Hō Chōngsuk, the most influential united front leader on the left, appears to have had doubts on this score despite adherence to the classical doctrine of the inseparability of women's and class liberation.<sup>42</sup> This problem, however, appears to have occupied the minds of only a few women in Korea at the time. Although there were signs following the 1919 March First Movement that the earlier emphasis on enlightenment through education was giving way to political activism, Pak Noa despondently observed that efforts to link their fortunes to proletarian liberation movements were not supported by ordinary women. In her view, this was chiefly because the leaders impetuously attempted to inject an ideology too radical and difficult to grasp in the context of existing customs and ethics.<sup>43</sup>

There might be an element of truth in this attribution. If so, however, it places the socialist leadership in much the same position as the educated 'bourgeois' women they arraigned for being out of touch with working women. But the chief reason for the ideology being beyond the grasp of the mass of women was not its radical nature so much as the continuing illiteracy of the bulk of the population. Educated socialist women encountered much the same problem as the liberal-feminists of the early 1920s, such as Kim Wōnju and Na Hyesōk, the first Korean women to publish and manage journals,<sup>44</sup> who suffered from what we might term the dilemmas of print-feminism. These dilemmas included the difficulties of women getting their voices heard in the media and journals and the problem of their becoming isolated from the majority of women they wanted to reach by the very ideas they introduced.

But if we listen to the voices of those female workers who did attain literacy through the education movements, it is evident that they did not necessarily regard the more highly educated women as remote beings and were quite aware of the benefits for themselves of a basic education. Indeed, they demanded education. Kim Chōngwōn, for example, a member of the Ch'ōngjin branch of the women's united front movement

in 1929, who found employment in factories and from time to time in domestic service, wrote that working women relied on the so-called bourgeois educational organisations to assist them out of their ignorance and poverty by teaching them basic knowledge and skills. Kim Chŏngwŏn contended that what the common women sought from the educated women was a sense of solidarity with their situation and needs, and opined that the solution to their lowly status began with the simple learning of their 'ABC.'<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the axiom proclaimed in the 1890s that the surest route to women's liberation was financial independence was easy to grasp, as was the argument that financial independence required acquisition of new knowledge. Accordingly, education remained the central principle of the women's movements through the colonial period.<sup>46</sup>

## **Conclusion**

There was little disagreement among female activists of different ideological persuasions over the dire plight of the mass of women, nor that they had to be given prime attention. Division between frivolous, self-centred, elite or bourgeois women and champions of the lower classes was certainly not a defining feature of the women's movements. The main difference between the socialist/communist Yŏsŏng tonguhoe and the Protestant-based YWCA was that the former believed that given the absolute prevalence of uneducated women in Korea at the time, a socialistic approach was the only feasible one, whereas the latter believed the foundation of any action for change in women's lot was education, beginning with literacy and basic knowledge.<sup>47</sup> Their point was that, as the women's Kŭnuhoe movement's survey of women's work in 1929 revealed, mobilising women into the urban industrial equivalent of rural agricultural work did not itself raise women's status, since it replicated their traditional economic and social subservience to men, who continued to control the nature and rewards of women's employment.<sup>48</sup> The pressing need was to lay foundations of independent thought among women and assist them to move into the new professions that assured them in time an influential role in shaping social structures and attitudes. Just as Kim Hwallan and her ilk did not see female emancipation as analogous to national liberation, neither did they regard women's liberation as analogous to or dependent upon class liberation. If anything, they saw gender division as more fundamental, universal and original than class divisions, and a considerable body of writings on women's history now takes much the same viewpoint.

For activists such as Kim Hwallan and Pak Indŏk, the belief that education of women as a good in itself and a means to their participation in the formation of the society in which they lived, stemmed from a fundamentally religious perception of their responsibilities. They acted on this perception at a time when individual family members' choices were affected



by cultural taboos and powerful social and political restraints and when legal and social disregard for women left them little leeway to access resources, launch initiatives, and benefit from employment opportunities outside the household and kinship networks. They consistently gave precedence to religious and educational activity over pursuit of overt political ends, even the emotionally powerful nationalist movement, and even after liberation from colonial rule in 1945, Kim Hwallan eschewed all offers of political appointments in favour of founding and directing Ewha Women's University. By transforming their social roles, these women not only undermined the traditional family structures, but radically enlarged the degree of women's participation in the public realm.

Through their concentration on educational and vocational activities, women's movements in colonial Korea anticipated what is now more or less agreed about women's issues in western countries, namely, that entry into higher education and paid employment from the 1950s has been far more effective in increasing women's influence in the public realm than acquisition of voting rights. To be sure, women in Korea now have the vote, the 'domestic sphere' has in a structural sense ended, and women's own expectations have been transformed. But the gap between material and behavioural culture remains wide: women live in a modernised society where they remain subject to traditional expectations by others.<sup>49</sup> Despite women gaining the vote, their public status revolution has been postponed. That suffrage and public power ought ideally to go together is of course hardly a matter for debate. But in the Korean colonial case, they could not and did not go together, and yet the changes the women set in motion in Korean society remain of greater magnitude than anything that has occurred since 1948.

## Notes

- 1 Our knowledge of the North Korean situation is still too poor and imprecise to draw any useful conclusions on the effect there on women of voting rights *per se*.
- 2 Cal Clark and Rose J. Lee, 'Women's Status in East Asia,' in Rose J. Lee and Cal Clark (eds), *Democracy and the Status of Women in East Asia*, Boulder: Lynne Rainer, 2000, pp. 1, 5.
- 3 Rose J. Lee, 'Electoral Reform and Women's Empowerment: Taiwan and South Korea,' in Rose J. Lee and Cal Clark (eds), *Democracy and the Status of Women in East Asia*, Boulder: Lynne Rainer, 2000, pp. 50–2.
- 4 Kim Hyung-chan, *Letters in Exile: The Life and Times of Yun Ch'i-ho*, Covington: Rhoades, 1980, p. 65.
- 5 Sheldon Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds: The State in Everyday Life*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, pp. 119, 123.
- 6 See my discussion of Yun's position in Kenneth M. Wells, 'The Price of Legitimacy: Women and the Kūnuhoe Movement, 1927–1931,' in Shin Gi-Wook and Michael Robinson (eds), *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 211–13.
- 7 Sök Nam, 'Yösöng haebang undonge taehaya – kü sajök kach'iwa mit

- chôngch'ijök üüü,' *Pyŏlgŏn'gon*, vol. 5, 5, 1930, 86; Pak Noa, 'Yösŏng konghwang sidae,' *Pyŏlgŏn'gon*, vol. 5, 6 1930, 59.
- 8 Sök Nam, op. cit., p. 87.
- 9 Kim Yun'gyŏng, 'Puin ch'amjŏnggwŏn munje,' *Shin Yösŏng*, vol. 2, 8, 1924, 15.
- 10 Ibid., pp. 16–19.
- 11 Ibid., p. 20.
- 12 Jean Gelman Taylor (ed.), *Women Creating Indonesia: The First Fifty Years*, Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1997, pp. 2–5.
- 13 Garon, op. cit., p. 115.
- 14 Lee In, 'Puin pomnyulsang chiwi,' *Pyŏlgŏn'gon*, vol. 4, 7, 1929, 172–3.
- 15 The only proposal for women's voting rights I have come across was an inclusion in a list of five items on which to lobby the government, but in this case it is evident from the context that the author was proposing voting rights in workplace associations, not in national or local government elections. See Song Kyewŏl, 'Akchedouï ch'ölp'ye,' *Tonggwang*, 29 (January) 1932, 73.
- 16 See Kenneth M. Wells, 'The Cultural Construction of Korean History,' in Kenneth M. Wells (ed.), *South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence*, Honolulu: Hawai'i University Press, 1995, Chapter 1.
- 17 J. Manning Potts (ed.), *Grace Sufficient: The Story of Helen Kim by Herself*, Nashville: The Upper Room, 1964, pp. 7–9.
- 18 Potts, op. cit., pp. 10–12.
- 19 Recent micro-studies of European experiences confirm that households are the units that most effectively conceive strategies for coping with social and historical change. See Laurence Fontaine and Jürgen Schlumbohm, 'Household Strategies for Survival,' *International Review of Social History*, Introduction to Supplement no. 8, 2000, 1–17.
- 20 Potts, op. cit., p. 15.
- 21 Ibid., pp. 10–15, 53–67.
- 22 See Louise Yim, *My Forty-Year Fight for Korea*, Seoul: Chungang University Press, 1964, pp. 57–61.
- 23 Kim Kihyök, *Kim Hyŏnsök Changno Chŏn'gi*, Seoul: Macmillan, 1982.
- 24 Yi Tan, 'Ch'öngnyŏn yŏjahoe ch'angnip,' *Shin in'gan*, 7 (November) 1926, 44.
- 25 Chŏng Sehyŏn, 'Niseijika no fujin undō kosatsu – minzoku undō tonō kanren o chūshin ni shite,' *Kan*, vol. 2, 3, 1973, 58–60.
- 26 Potts, op. cit., pp. 83–4.
- 27 Induk Pahk, *September Monkey*, New York: Harper, 1954, pp. 188, 211.
- 28 Potts, op. cit., p. 84.
- 29 Kang Kyŏngae, *In'gan munje*, P'yongyang: Rodong sinmunsa, 1949.
- 30 For a recent, penetrating analysis of Kang's novel and its relation to women and work in the colonial period, see Ruth Barraclough's doctoral dissertation, 2003, cited here with author's permission.
- 31 I have examined this tendency in some detail elsewhere. See Wells, 'The Price of Legitimacy,' op. cit., Chapter 7.
- 32 Pak Noa, op. cit., p. 60.
- 33 Ibid., pp. 60–2.
- 34 Ibid., p. 63.
- 35 Sök Nam, op. cit., p. 87.
- 36 Ibid., p. 88.
- 37 Ibid., p. 88.
- 38 'Kwagŏ illyŏn'ganü Chosŏn yösŏng undong,' *Tonggwang*, 28 (December) 1931, 13–14.
- 39 Elisabeth Eide, *China's Ibsen: From Ibsen to Ibsenism*, London: Curzon, 1987, p. 75.

- 40 Park Hyun Ok, 'Ideals of Liberation: Korean Women in Manchuria,' in Elaine H. Kim and Chungmoo Choi (eds), *Dangerous Women: Gender and Korean Nationalism*, London: Routledge, 1998, p. 231.
- 41 Ibid., p. 234.
- 42 See Wells, 'The Price of Legitimacy,' op. cit., pp. 215–16.
- 43 Pak Noa, op. cit., p. 59.
- 44 Their journals were, respectively, *Shin yōja* (New woman) and *Yōjagye* (Women's world), launched in 1920. There is very little written in English on the liberal-feminist movement, but a number of serious studies have appeared in Korean over the past decade or so. See Korea Women's Studies Institute, *Uri yōsōngūl yōksa*, Seoul: Ch'ōngnōyonsa, 1999, Chapters 9–14; Lee Yunhŭl, *Han'guk minjokjuūwa yōsōng undong*, Seoul: Shinsōwŏn, 1995; Sō Chōngja (ed. and comp.), *Chōngwŏl Na Hyesōk chōnjip*, Seoul: Kukhak charyowŏn, 2001; *Yōsōng*, the journal of the Korean Women's History Association.
- 45 Kim Chōngwŏn, 'Hoewōnūrosō ūi hūimang,' *Kūnu*, 1929, 62.
- 46 Ch'oe Kiyōng reiterated this principle in 'Yōsōng haebangŭn kyōngjero put'ō,' *Tonggwang*, 29 (January) 1932, p. 74.
- 47 Chōng Sehyōn, op. cit., pp. 61–2. There were also those who considered that since women were likely to remain for some time in the kitchen, reform of kitchens was the realistic place to begin. But this latter view was associated with the idea that modernisation for women meant upgrading the spheres of life and action that traditionally applied, and was made for the most part by men. See, for example, Kim Sōngjin, 'Uri kajōngūi wisaengjōk saenghwal kaesōn: Saenghwal ūi pyōnhwawa yōsōng haebang,' *Tonggwang*, 36 (August) 1932, 73.
- 48 Pak Hosin, 'Yōjikkong pangmun'gi,' *Kūnu*, 1929, 70–3.
- 49 On the gap between material and behavioural culture in the more recent experience of South Korea, see Marian Lief Palley, 'Women's Status in South Korea: Tradition and Change,' *Asian Survey*, vol. 30, 12, 1990, 1136–53.

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## 8 The politics of women's suffrage in Thailand<sup>1</sup>

*Tamara Loos*

In Thailand women did not campaign for the right to vote or stand for election, but were granted it along with men in 1932. At the time, no one debated the need for women's suffrage or discussed its relevance to nationalism. By contrast, in the USA and Britain, whose histories of women's suffrage constitute the norm by which other suffrage movements are gauged, suffrage is considered one of *the* milestones in women's political history.

In Siam, as Thailand was called until 1939, an absolute monarch reigned without representative political institutions until 1932, when a coup replaced the absolute monarchy with a constitutional one. In 1933 the new government promulgated a constitution that granted the right to vote and run for national office simultaneously to both men *and* women. Placed within this domestic political trajectory, the significance and meaning of the vote acquires drastically different connotations in Siam than in the USA and Britain.<sup>2</sup> It also raises the question about whether women's suffrage is a comparably significant marker of women's political progress in Siam. The paradoxical case of Siam, where women's political rights were granted before there was a recognizable, organized women's movement is explored in this chapter. It considers the framework within which we can understand women's suffrage and political rights historically in the absence of an organized women's movement.

Two quandaries bedevil the study of women's rights in the history of Siam – one is peculiar to Siam and the other is applicable to most non-Western countries. The first quandary asks: how can we study Thailand's political modernity, including women's rights, without reductively giving credit to the monarchy? This current account of women's political rights disrupts the normative narrative of Thai historiography, which posits the monarch as the agent of all progressive history. Instead of glorifying the monarch for generating Siam's political, economic, and social modernity, this study shows the limits of the monarch's authority and thus decentres him as the sole locus of power.

The second quandary asks: how can we write a history of women's suffrage and rights in non-Western countries without implicitly regarding it

as a site of mimicry for Western forms of political modernity.<sup>3</sup> Writing a chapter on women's suffrage and rights may inadvertently place Siam's history within the framework of a teleological model of politics that developed out of the culturally-specific experience of Europe. This chapter, by contrast, attempts to decentre assumptions about the pre-eminence of European political modernity embedded in a search for women's suffrage in Asia. By highlighting Siam's alternative political modernity – that is, the ways in which Siam's political modernity was unique but comparable to that of the West and its colonies – the project decentres the historicist, universalizing model of modernity. In other words, women's suffrage in Siam obtains different meanings in Siam's political trajectory. Siam's case is not radically unique nor is it reductively the same.

This chapter seeks to perform a dual decentring. It decentres Europe as the paradigm of political modernity while simultaneously decentring Siam's monarch as the agent of all progressive history. It does so by reconsidering narratives of Siam's political history, both those written specifically about women as well as general political histories. Political histories of women in Thailand divide their subject into two periods – the premodern and the modern – bisected in the mid-nineteenth century, when Siam's economic base shifted from subsistence agriculture to export commercialization.<sup>4</sup> Scholarship about women during the premodern period is concerned primarily with issues of women's 'status,' and argues that women had a relatively high status compared to women in India and China because the Siamese population practised bilateral (and matrifocal) rather than patrilineal kinship. To counter this oversimplified evaluation of women's status, other scholars differentiate women by class and incorporate an analysis of the asymmetrical gendered operation of Buddhism, the patriarchal state, and polygyny.

Studies of the modern period of women's political history follow a dynastic model. They typically begin with a recitation of King Mongkut's (r. 1851–68) proclamations issued in the 1860s, which forbade husbands and parents from selling their wives and daughters into servitude without the consent of these women (see Amdaeng Can's case below), and which allowed commoner women to select their own spouses (see Amdaeng Muan's case below). King Chulalongkorn (r. 1868–1910), the monarch renowned for modernizing Siam's administration, gradually abolished slavery during his reign. This freed many women (and men) from permanent, legal servitude. He also established educational institutions for elite women, ensuring a new generation of literate women. King Vajiravudh (1910–25) rallied against polygyny and prostitution in his essays (but not in law) and promoted women's education by passing the Primary Education Act in 1921, which made primary school attendance compulsory for girls and boys. During his reign, a sizable educated group of men and women vociferously participated in a vibrant public press, which

raged with debates about polygyny, women's education, motherhood, and wifedom.

The dynastic narrative terminates and nationalist narrative begins in 1932 when the People's Party (*Khana Ratsadon*) overthrew the absolute monarchy, established a constitutional monarchy, and granted universal suffrage to men and women. In 1935, the newly established parliament passed a monogamy law that significantly fell short of criminalizing polygyny. Although women could run for Parliament from 1933 (the first woman was elected in 1949), they were barred from holding administrative, district, and village level posts until 1982. Finally, the radical constitution of 1974 granted men and women equal rights for the first time, which provided women with a constitutional basis to challenge discriminatory practices. Equal rights protection was revoked in 1976 but re-established in the 1997 Constitution. This overview of women's political history, summarized from existing scholarship, provides the overarching framework within which I target two events which serve as metonyms for two dominant narratives that structure women's history in Siam – the 1868 court case of Amdaeng Mūan and the 1932 overthrow of the absolute monarchy that granted universal suffrage. Women's political histories canonically refer to both events as key markers of women's progress, and despite my critique of the operation of these events in Siam's historiography, they nonetheless had an ameliorating impact on the lives of many women. However, because they are emplotted in Siam's royal and nationalist accounts, it is difficult to disentangle them from these metanarratives and validate them as watersheds for women.

The first case (of Amdaeng Mūan) allows me to consider the ways in which women's history has been appropriated and domesticated within a pro-monarchical framework. Amdaeng Mūan, as a 'female first,' earns first billing in Thai women's histories because these histories are often structured around the monarch, who is credited for granting to women 'rights.' I unpack the historiography buttressing a unilinear reading of Siam's first feminist to open her case to a multiplicity of historical interpretations. Amdaeng Mūan is also appropriated within a framework that understands women's history as a chronological accumulation of progressively more inclusive rights leading up to the right to vote in 1932.

This chronological approach based on milestone markers is the second narrative of women's history treated here. Scholars of women's political history in Siam have centred their story on the accumulation of legal rights that privileges suffrage, gained in 1932, as paramount. Because the historical accounts of 1932 are gender-blind, yet fundamentally about granting democratic rights to men *and* women, a focus on the event allows one to query both the gendered production of knowledge in Thai studies and to decentre European enlightenment assumptions embedded in the topic of women's suffrage itself. Suffrage occurred in Siam but for different reasons and along a different trajectory than in most Western coun-

tries. The two case studies suggest a methodology for writing women's history in Siam. Taking Siam's 'first feminist' out of a narrative that glorifies the monarchy and extracting women's suffrage from the narrative of political modernity enables historians to re-evaluate the significance of such events in their historical milieu and integrate gender into the mainstream history of Siam.

### **Decentring the monarchy in Siam's history**

One key reason why the monarchy takes centre stage in modern histories of Siam is the result of a single fact that dominates that country's historiography: Siam, unlike all other countries in Southeast Asia, was never colonized. By focusing on its unique status as an independent country, nationalist narratives credit Siam's monarchy with safeguarding the kingdom's sovereignty by 'modernizing' the country along Western lines.

Typically, political histories of women in Siam begin during the reign of King Mongkut (Rama IV). Women's history prior to King Mongkut's reign, with a few exceptions, is jettisoned as belonging to a kind of ahistorical dark age, substantiated through reference to the *Three Seals Laws* which served as the legal foundation for polygyny, granted the right of alienation over women to her parents or husband, and instantiated other laws understood as patriarchal from a modern lens.<sup>5</sup> Change begins with Rama IV and the signing of the Bowring Treaty with Britain in 1855. Women's historians at both ends of the political spectrum have acknowledged the significance for gender relations of the socio-economic changes catalyzed by the treaty.<sup>6</sup> At one end of the spectrum – the end that appropriates progressive change as the result of monarchical intervention – is the volume published by the Women's Law Association of Thailand entitled, *A Mark of Progress: The Condition of Women*.<sup>7</sup> It republished selected laws promulgated by King Mongkut (and others) regarded today as proto-feminist. At the other end of the spectrum are feminist scholars such as Siriphon Skrobanek who is more critical of the impact of the Bowring Treaty on women. She argues that it lowered the status of rural women because their economic power decreased, and it created new standards of femininity for urban women that were nonetheless patriarchal.<sup>8</sup> Regardless of their politicized evaluation of King Mongkut and the Bowring Treaty, both interpretations neatly prioritize the West and the monarch in the historical narrative of women in Siam.

It follows then that the reign of Rama IV produced Siam's 'first feminist,' Amdaeng Mūan, who has been eulogized as such in history, literature, and film.<sup>9</sup> As a female first, women's historians have appropriated her as the first link in a chain of events that led to women's suffrage and constitutionally protected gender equality. Below I question the emblematic status of Amdaeng Mūan for women's history by considering the enduring reproduction of her story in Thailand's national narrative. I first



show how her story reifies the centrality of the monarchy to women's political history in Thailand and then reveal some alternative interpretations of her story that are silenced in the process. In so doing, I hope to demonstrate a methodology for decentring the monarchy.

### **Was King Mongkut a proto-feminist?**

The first event in the normative narrative of Thai women's history revolves around Amdaeng Mūan, a commoner woman accorded iconic status as Thailand's first feminist. She submitted a desperate legal petition (*dika*) in the early 1860s to King Mongkut, who in 1865 and 1868 ruled in her favour and thus established a new proclamation on behalf of commoner women. Briefly, the petition recounted her story as follows. Amdaeng Mūan and Nai Rit, a man from her village in Nonthaburi, were lovers, unbeknown to Amdaeng Mūan's parents,<sup>10</sup> who arranged her marriage to a wealthy and polygynous man. Amdaeng Mūan resolutely refused to consummate the marriage even after several beatings and being threatened at gunpoint by her parents. She eloped with Nai Rit, was caught, and was imprisoned for adultery (*tham chu*). She escaped from prison and sent a petition to the king explaining her situation.<sup>11</sup> As a result of Amdaeng Mūan's case, King Mongkut allowed Amdaeng Mūan to marry Nai Rit and promulgated two new decrees on *lakpha* (abduction/elopement) in 1865 and 1868 that allowed women aged above 20 years to select their spouses without parental consent.<sup>12</sup>

From this we learn that King Mongkut was a proto-feminist who promulgated laws that benefited women. Amdaeng Mūan emerges as an advocate for the rights of women to exercise individual free choice – an important principle in Enlightenment conceptions of the individual – even if limited to the narrow arena of spousal selection. Amdaeng Mūan owed her success to King Mongkut's benevolence. We cannot praise her without inadvertently glorifying him. We learn, ultimately, that King Mongkut is central to women's rights and that Siam can engage with Western political conceptions of rights on Siam's own turf and terms. Siam had its own feminist fighting for women's rights and individual freedom in the 1860s.

Scratch beneath the surface of this celebratory narrative, however, and we see additional facts that are silenced in the process of retelling Amdaeng Mūan's story. First, present day reproductions of Amdaeng Mūan's case silence the salient connection between gender and class by privileging gender and ignoring class. The decrees on *lakpha* conditionally granted some women, not all, the legal opportunity to choose their spouses regardless of parental consent. In particular, women who came from commoner families (with a *sakdina* or status ranking of less than four hundred)<sup>13</sup> could select their own spouses.<sup>14</sup> In disputes involving daughters from elite families (with a four hundred *sakdina* ranking or higher),

judges had to follow the wishes of the woman's father.<sup>15</sup> The two consecutive decrees thus granted greater control over choice of marital partners to commoner women but withheld it from women born into higher status families. In disputed marriages involving elite families, the king continued to support the power of parents to exercise nearly unilateral decision-making power.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, the 'right' of commoner women to select their spouses in law was inseparably linked to the negation of elite women's voice in their selection of a partner. We cannot invoke the boon of one group of women without invoking the misfortune of another, yet the emphasis on the category of women at the expense of class is precisely what common narratives of Amdaeng Mūan's story enable. Once this silence is exposed, both the conservative aspects of the seemingly flawlessly progressive precedent and the self-interest of the monarch to reinforce class hierarchies are revealed. This desire on the part of the king was explicit in the 1860s but obscured in later excavations of the case as historians de-classed the event. By focusing on gender rather than class, King Mongkut is regarded as a proto-feminist when actually he promoted class-based gender discrimination.

However, if class drove the analysis of this case, the monarchy might not fare as well. King Mongkut wrote in the 1865 decree that he suspected Amdaeng Mūan's parents of selling their daughter for profit to Nai Phu.<sup>17</sup> In future cases involving marital disputes over women from non-elite families, judges were required to follow the wishes of the woman rather than her family because it is 'natural' for poor parents 'to think only of money and gold' and to coerce the sale of their children.<sup>18</sup> In another now-famous case, that of Amdaeng Can, a similar class-based bias occurs. Amdaeng Can, also a female commoner from the nineteenth century, similarly gained fame as one of Siam's first women's rights advocates. Her husband sold her into slavery without her knowledge or consent. The king used Amdaeng Can's case to preface a law in 1868 prohibiting commoner husbands and parents from selling wives and children without first receiving the permission of these dependants.<sup>19</sup> As with Amdaeng Mūan's case, scholars have cited this law as additional proof of King Mongkut's concern for women and individual rights.<sup>20</sup> However, the laws regarding *commoner* parental control over their daughter's marriage and *commoner* husband's ability to sell his wife into servitude diminish the economic power of non-elite men while increasing the control of elite men over women. Again, the laws are not simply pro-women, but rather embed a complexity of class and gender discrimination. The maintenance of a divide between commoners and elites (aristocracy and royalty) was executed through laws on 'women's rights' but the contemporary focus on the new 'rights' of women occludes this perspective.

The third interpretation silenced through the narration of Amdaeng Mūan's case is that of the weakness of the monarchy as an institution in the mid-nineteenth century. Consideration of the case in its economic

and political contexts reveals the monarch as merely one locus of power vying for dominance and continued relevance among others. The king promulgated the *lakpha* and servitude decrees because he feared upsetting his power base. That is why judges deciding disputes involving women from elite families were instructed to follow the wishes of the woman's father. Otherwise, the king wrote in the decree, an elite woman with a high rank might obtain a commoner husband. This would upset elite families because such marriages would decrease their descendants' social status. Elite families would withdraw their support from a king who passed laws that disrupted the social hierarchy.<sup>21</sup> Such a king would have reason to fear for his position.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, Amdaeng Mūan's story entails yet another silencing that has valences for the political rights of contemporary Thai women. The romanticization of her case refutes the validity of the rights of women as autonomous subjects, as individuals. Instead, it casts women's rights in terms of their familial and gendered position as wives. For women today, her story reinforces a romantic ideology of love and constrains women's rights within the heteronormative role of wife, not as an abstract individual or even as a 'woman' (as an overarching gender category opposed to men).

King Mongkut did not promote the welfare of women as a whole. Rather the laws he passed that produced the 'female firsts' were directed against commoner men and favoured elite groups upon whom his power depended. The original decree does not conceal these facts, but they are not emphasized in popular renderings reproduced since the 1940s.<sup>23</sup> Amdaeng Mūan's case is arguably the most famous legal case in Siam's history, having been the source of countless articles and of the award-winning 1994 motion picture *Amdaeng Mūan kap Nai Rit*.<sup>24</sup> The timing of the case's initial publicity in 1949 is telling. Margaret Landon's book, *Anna and the King of Siam*, originally published in 1944, was produced as a film in 1946. King Mongkut was portrayed as tyrannical and misogynist in both versions. In 1949 *Mom Ratchawong* Seni Pramoj, a diplomat, politician and minor royal family member presented Amdaeng Mūan's case within an article-long defence of the king at the Siam Society in Bangkok. The reigning monarch and numerous Westerners and Thais were in the audience.<sup>25</sup>

The reproduction of Amdaeng Mūan's unquestionably heroic deeds highlights certain messages over others, ultimately producing a single, hegemonic version of the story. In the dominant narrative, the monarch resurfaces as a progressive force and Amdaeng Mūan becomes the icon for 'women,' regardless of class distinctions or sexual preferences. An alternative narrative would reveal the monarch as uninterested in promoting women's rights, since neither King Mongkut nor Amdaeng Mūan pursued the case in order to improve the lives of all women. An alternative narrative would explore the relationship of this case to King

Mongkut's political and economic power base. It might argue that he promulgated the law to maintain his own position vis-à-vis powerful ministerial families. It might interpret the law as a product of the king's Buddhist moral worldview that mistrusted the motivations of people at the lower end of the Buddhist cosmic order. Indeed, other royal commands from this period support this interpretation.<sup>26</sup> A new interpretation would necessarily highlight class differences rather than subordinating them to a romanticized, unthreatening 'feminist' version.

### **Decentring Europe in studies of suffrage**

In contrast to the detailed evaluation women's historians have given Amdaeng Muan is the cursory attention given the overthrow of the absolute monarchy in 1932. This event has not been analysed in-depth for its impact on women. After the June 1932 coup the People's Party promulgated a constitution that provided for a nationally elected Assembly of Representatives (Parliament). It granted universal suffrage in 1932, which was exercised indirectly in 1933, and directly in 1937 when people voted for half of the Assembly. Siam joined the still relatively short list of countries that guaranteed universal suffrage. These included New Zealand (1893), the Cook Islands (1893), several Eastern and Western European nations, the USA (1920), Britain (1928), Brazil (1932), and Uruguay (1932), among others. Siam, following Sri Lanka (1931), was one of the first countries in Asia to grant full suffrage.<sup>27</sup>

As Susan Blackburn has noted, a focus on suffrage presumes the existence of operative democratic institutions,<sup>28</sup> which in turn assumes that a Western-style democracy exists or is the desired political model to emulate. Embedded in the topic of women's suffrage and rights are assumptions about political modernity, which refers to rule by the modern institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise.<sup>29</sup> These institutions and associated concepts such as citizenship, rights, the individual, civil society, and others, are concepts that have roots in the European Enlightenment and nineteenth-century imperialism. The rest of the world, including Siam, learned about these concepts through contact (usually colonial) with European imperialist forces in a context of asymmetrical power relations.<sup>30</sup> As elucidated by Dipesh Chakrabarty, European concepts about political modernity are both indispensable *and* inadequate in thinking about what constitutes political modernity elsewhere.<sup>31</sup> They are indispensable because it is impossible to *think* about political modernity without invoking categories such as rights, suffrage, the political, and so on. They are also indispensable because of the historical context and process by which these ideas infiltrated non-Western sites.

The problem for contemporary feminists, aware of the dangers of Eurocentrism, lies herewith: how can we discuss women's rights and

simultaneously argue against the imposition of a teleological model of democratic politics?<sup>32</sup> If the idea of rights is inherently imbued with Western historicist assumptions, how can we write about women's rights without invoking this model? More importantly, do we want to jettison democratic ideals and perpetuate the omission of a gender analysis in studies of suffrage because these concepts are embedded in European historicist ways of thinking? This would miss the point: Siam's leaders did introduce representative institutions and universal suffrage, so excluding them from analysis amounts to a wilful blindness. Instead, it is possible and essential to be conscious of European historicism imbuing such ideals while contextualizing their introduction and development in Siam.

One way to critique the Western modular form of democracy has already been accomplished by feminist historians and critical race theorists. They have exposed the fact that democratic countries characterized by universal suffrage can also be oppressive, patriarchal, racist, and in other ways undemocratic. The struggle for women's suffrage in Britain and the USA, for example, created fissures within the Western narrative of political modernity that initially denied women such political rights. Only after women received the franchise was women's suffrage appropriated as modern and Western.

How does this exegesis of European historicism relate to a chapter on women and politics in Thailand? Unlike the USA and Britain, where the existence of democratic institutions and ideology created an increasingly tense contradiction between inclusive political ideals and exclusionary practices, Siam had no representative political institutions to speak of in the early twentieth century. Consequently, women did not agitate for political representation. However, by the 1920s, the modern education system had created a small, educated female population in Bangkok. While their attendance at the highest institutions of learning was still limited, over 200,000 women were enrolled in primary schools by the 1920s. A sizable female reading public enabled the publication of several short-lived women's magazines and journals where women wrote about issues that most concerned middle-class women.<sup>33</sup> Among these were increased educational and employment opportunities, and the inequities of polygynous marriage. Middle-class women writing in the public press advocated that women's status had to be improved in these areas before Siam could be considered modern and civilized, to use two catchwords of the early twentieth century.<sup>34</sup> Below I consider the impact of the 1932 coup and bequest of political rights to women on the issues of their greatest concern – education, employment, and polygyny.

### **1932 in comparative perspective: did Thai women have a revolution?**

The People's Party proclaimed on 24 June 1932 that they

must provide the people with equal rights (so that those of royal blood do not have more rights than the people as at present)... Everyone will have equal rights and freedom from being serfs (*phrai*) and slaves (*that*) of royalty. The time has ended when those of royal blood farm on the backs of the people.<sup>35</sup>

The People's Party that staged the successful coup against Rama VII, King Prajithipok, included over one hundred civilian officials and military and naval officers. The majority of party members had received an education abroad, so they were familiar with 'cosmopolitan' codes of civilized standards, including politically progressive norms such as universal suffrage. The coup received the support of a wide spectrum of urban Bangkok society, including business leaders, urban intellectuals, and labour organizers. There were no women involved in the 1932 overthrow. There was no mass agitation for a change in government let alone for universal suffrage.

The democratic principles of the People's Party included the promotion of economic nationalism, equality for all, and education for all.<sup>36</sup> The provisional constitution promulgated in 1932 provided for a new government, headed by a constitutional monarch, the People's Committee (later referred to as the Cabinet), and an elected Assembly (Parliament). The Assembly of Representatives was appointed in full by the People's Party (70 members) until 1933, when indirect elections were held for half of the members of the Assembly.<sup>37</sup> Feminist scholars often cite Clause 14 of the provisional constitution, which guaranteed the right to vote and run for election to the Assembly to all Thai nationals over the age of twenty, regardless of sex. By 1937, the first direct elections were held for half the Assembly members, but the Cabinet dissolved it when it proved recalcitrant. The Assembly was not wholly elected until 1952.<sup>38</sup> The first woman Member of Parliament (MP), Mrs. Orapin Chaiyakarn, the wife of a famous MP from Ubon Ratchathani, was elected in 1949. The state appointed two additional women to the Senate the same year.<sup>39</sup> Four women were elected in the next elections, held in 1952, while only one, Thanphuying La-ia-d Phibunsongkhram, the wife of the Prime Minister, ran successfully for Parliament in 1957. Between 1932 and 1991, only forty-one women (2.8 per cent) had been elected as Members of Parliament.<sup>40</sup>

1932 is arguably the most significant event in the narrative of Thai nationalism. If 1932 was a revolution, as some have argued, in the form of government from an absolute monarchy to a parliamentary democracy,

then did women in Siam also have a revolution? In the plethora of accounts that have been generated in recent years about 1932, none has asked why women and men were both granted the right to vote.<sup>41</sup> In the absence of widespread popular campaigns for the right to vote, can we assume that suffrage was the most meaningful milestone of political progress for Siamese women (and men) in this context? Why did the People's Party decide to grant women's suffrage in 1932, twelve years before France, the country where most of the key coup leaders had studied? When we turn to the historical record, how was 1932 significant for women? We need to reread the historical evidence with these questions in mind.

There are two interacting arenas – the international and the domestic – to take into account while reconsidering the importance of suffrage and new political rights introduced to Siam in 1932. The domestic issues are ultimately the ones I focus on below, but it is necessary to recall Siam's unique position in the international context. It was both non-Western and non-colonized, which means that its relationship to suffrage does not follow the most typical path through which populations received the vote. Feminist scholars have noted that the standard model of women's suffrage is that of the USA and Britain, where suffrage was granted in a series of steps that gradually incorporated the entire population regardless of race, class, or sex.<sup>42</sup> However, the Anglo-American time frame was not the norm for most countries, especially those that had been colonized. In colonized countries that had no meaningful representative institutions for which elections might be held, suffrage was often granted universally rather than in stages immediately upon independence. From this perspective, Siam looks very much like a colonized country. Once the coup group overthrew the absolute monarchy in 1932, universal suffrage was granted without hesitation. In theory Siam's royal and noble elite are comparable to European colonizers.<sup>43</sup>

In the domestic arena, the focus remained on ridding the country of absolutism before considering suffrage. Significantly, there are no documented debates among members of the People's Party or in the print media about suffrage, whether it should be universal, all male, or class-based. Instead, scholarship on 1932 elucidates the background of the individuals involved, their resentment of the absolutist system, and the economic context that led historically (some say inevitably) to the coup. Ideologically, the concept of equality litters the newspapers of the era and documents written by leaders of the coup such as Pridi Banomyong. These sources strongly indicate that equality was conceived in class terms rather than in gender terms, as if the two could not be conceptualized together. The People's Party announcement on the day of the coup, cited above, is exemplary. It specifically defines equal rights with the denial of royal privilege and the provision of freedom to two groups defined in terms of their class status: *phrai* or common people who often were indebted to elites, and *that*, glossed here as slaves. It is unclear whom exactly they meant by *slaves*, given that slavery had been abolished since 1904, but it is

explicit that class not gender dominated their operative notion of equality. Gender concerns and subject-positions were subordinated to class issues.<sup>44</sup> Equality was used throughout the period to criticize unequal social standing, legal rights, economic opportunities, and the nobility as an institution. Status, based on noble or royal birth, mocked this notion of equality under the law. When newspaper articles by government critics raised gender issues, they were mobilized to critique absolutism. It is reasonable to ask about the purpose of these articles: to what extent were women's issues used to contribute to the decline of absolutism rather than to the betterment of women per se?

The subordination of gender to class concerns was reflected in the total omission of debate about gender and politics in the writings, pronouncements, and laws of the 1932 coup leadership. Historians perpetuate this omission. The most innovative studies of 1932 have deconstructed the event as a struggle between the monarchy and new elements in the bureaucracy by revealing the multiplicity of the coup's supporters. These supporters included new social groups: domestic entrepreneurs, elements within the new bureaucracy, intellectuals, and new military men who resented the royal monopoly on power.<sup>45</sup>

The new government may have been gender blind, but it was not gender neutral in its administrative and political policies, despite its promotion of universal suffrage and lack of explicit concern with gender. Equality was not granted across the board: gender restrictions applied under the new government. For instance, women were not allowed to run in local elections for village head (*phuyaiban*) because, it seems, they were regarded as incapacitated by their gender to conduct the duties of policing associated with the position of village head. Women were prohibited from serving as heads (*kamnan*) of groups of villages (*tambon*) as well. These restrictions, created nearly two decades before 1932, were lifted only in 1982.<sup>46</sup> Given that the bureaucracy was composed of men, that local-level elected and appointed positions were the reserve of men, and that politics hitherto had been a male preserve, why were women granted the right to run for national office? Why would people believe that women could perform all aspects associated with being a Member of the Parliament (MP) or the Senate? The new government granted women the right to run as MPs and to vote partly because it desired to gain international diplomatic recognition as a modern nation. It also sought to preserve 'equality' as the foundation of the new state's legitimacy – not because it prioritized gender equality or the rights of women directly.<sup>47</sup> One scholar argues that Pridi Phanomyong and members of the People's Party granted women suffrage because it would assure their new government diplomatic recognition by the USA and Britain.<sup>48</sup> By granting universal suffrage, Siam's leaders ensured that Siam would be compared favourably to countries that were considered more civilized and politically progressive but that had not yet given women political rights.<sup>49</sup> Regardless of their reasons, women in Siam benefited.



An innovative history of 1932 and its aftermath would begin by considering the inextricable connections among politics, class, *and* gender and family networks.<sup>50</sup> Remember that the first woman elected to Parliament was married to a famous MP and that Thanphuying La-iad was the wife of Prime Minister Phibunsongkhram when she was elected in 1957. Women's participation in politics was eased through kinship networks and their familial position as wife, mother, and daughter – women whose roles remained safely within the heteronormative family. Indeed, major print media debates about women in the early twentieth century discussed women in terms of their familial relationships rather than as abstract individuals or categorically as 'women' who obtained political rights such as voting. This trend is particularly evident in articles about the relationship between women and the nation. Two individuals in the pre-1932 era stand out for their voluminous writings about women: Thianwan, aka T.W.S. Wannapho (1842–1915), and King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, r. 1910–25). These two men were diametrically opposed in many of their political beliefs: Thianwan desired a parliamentary government while King Vajiravudh inherently supported absolutism. Thianwan was a commoner-intellectual and was one of the first individuals to argue that the position of women had an important bearing on the well-being and progress of the nation.<sup>51</sup> Women were significant to national progress as mothers of the nation's children and as wives to patriotic husbands. Historian Scot Barmé summarizes Thianwan's views as follows:

[Thianwan] claimed that women were important because they had the power to influence men and the nation in either a positive or a negative way. For example, whether a child became a 'good' or 'bad' adult was directly related to the quality of the mother. Similarly, he claimed a woman could play an important role as a wife. In developing this theme Thianwan pointed to what he saw as a major social problem in Siam, that of rootless, wayward men becoming addicted to drink or opium and descending into a life of misery and suffering. Nevertheless, he was of the view that women could redress this problem. A wife, Thianwan said, could be compared to a ship's anchor, a source of stability.<sup>52</sup>

Thianwan's views are echoed with remarkable precision by King Vajiravudh, who wrote about women as mothers in an essay called 'Clog on Our Wheels.' Accordingly, a good mother devoted her life to the safe-keeping of her children, raising them to be honest, polite, and good future husbands.<sup>53</sup> However, bad mothers abandoned their motherly duties and took no interest in their children.<sup>54</sup> The king wrote that it was a parental obligation to:

raise their children to be useful to the group and to be an upright citizen of the nation. Their sons must be able to support the monarch

to do favours for their country as fitting for the name of the Thai people. Daughters should be a decoration that glorifies the nation by making herself a good wife and mother who understands her duties.<sup>55</sup>

The familial nature of the role women could play in nationalism was common the world over, but it is disturbing that two men with conflicting political beliefs could share such similar views. Scot Barmé and Matthew Copeland have scoured newspaper and journalistic sources from the early twentieth century to show that middle-class ideas were developing a distinct voice from that of royal elite, whose written works receive the lion's share of historical attention.<sup>56</sup> They both argue that the new middle class in Bangkok was critical of government policies issued by royal rulers. However, the rhetoric deployed by both royal elite and urban intellectuals is remarkably similar in flavour (sentimental, dramatic) and in terms of content. Royal elite and urban intellectuals both use the discourse of progress and civilization, but each harnessed the discourse to radically different political ends. In Thianwan's writings, ideas about women as wives and mothers of the nation are part of a larger political critique of Siam's government as lagging behind the West. However, Rama VI uses the same arguments about women against modern-minded commoners like Thianwan! In both cases, the goal is governmental transformation or preservation, not a better understanding of women's social or political integration into the state.

In studies of women's newspapers and journals printed in the early twentieth century, we learn that middle-class women expressed demands for increased educational and occupational opportunities and an end to polygyny. What difference did 1932 make in achieving these goals? In terms of educational policies for women, it appears that no major shifts occurred as a result of 1932. Formal education became available for women in 1901, and by 1904 there were 11,400 female students. The compulsory Primary Education Act, which increased women's educational opportunities, occurred under King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) in 1921, more than a decade before the coup.<sup>57</sup> By 1925 there were 232,120 girls in primary school and 385,808 boys.<sup>58</sup> At the tertiary level, nearly seventy women were enrolled at Chulalongkorn University by 1925. By 1937, 85 per cent of Siam's female population remained illiterate compared with 57 per cent of the male population.<sup>59</sup> The political changes introduced in 1932 seem to have had little impact on the trajectory of women's education, which was already on the upswing.

This increase in education for women was debated in the first decades of the twentieth century as potentially problematic because many believed that women would replace men in various occupations, including public service.<sup>60</sup> The government was guarded about women's demands for education. Prince Chayanat, who was responsible for national education policies, expressed his belief that women should have the same opportunities for an education as men but that women should

study different subjects to ensure that they do not compete with men for administrative positions. In a women's journal, *Satriniphon*, he wrote in October 1914:

We must be careful not to allow women to steal jobs that belong to men, don't allow them to become self-important [*uat di*] or to quarrel with men. Although women are allowed to study as much as men they must be taught to be women and to be aware that they will always be women.<sup>61</sup>

The emphasis on women serving in designated female occupations persisted through the 1930s and 1940s. Women had begun to enter the professions such as law beginning in the late 1920s, and the first woman matriculated at Thammasat law school in 1931–2.<sup>62</sup> However, women lawyers could not practise as public prosecutors or sit as judges until the 1970s. The first female judges were allowed to review cases exclusively at family courts because they were considered epistemologically privileged as mothers. Moreover, even though women gained the right to vote and run for parliament after 1932, they were banned from holding office at the subnational level.

In terms of attitudes toward polygyny, an oft-cited legal reform occurred in 1935 for which many credit the post-1932 leadership. In 1935, the newly elected People's Assembly voted in favour of establishing a monogamy law. The movement toward monogamy had been growing in the early twentieth century by absolutist and pro-democracy types, both of which shared a rather limited view of women's roles. This law, in various forms, had originally been drafted under the absolute monarchy, was not opposed by Rama VI, and had been vigorously supported by Rama VII, but they lacked the power to promulgate it. Can we credit the new government for the passing of the law, and can we claim this law as transformative for gender relations? Even after the law was promulgated, loopholes reaffirmed a gendered double standard. In addition, other laws relating to women's political rights did not change after 1932. All of Rama VI's patriarchal legal provisions regarding the bourgeois family, citizenship, and forms of address survived the 1932 coup without modification.

This preliminary account of education, employment, and polygyny raises important questions about how we evaluate the significance of 1932 for women. To what extent did conceptions of women's social roles and their relationship to politics change after 1932? The national rhetoric about family introduced by Thianwan and Rama VI resurfaced, in modified form, in the Cultural Mandates of the 1940s government, indicating that this vision of the national family ideal had persevered. Women were integrated into the state through beauty contests, public monuments such as that of Thao Suranari (a controversial historical heroine from Northeastern Thailand), and dramatic works written by ideologues like Luang Wichit

Wattakan, who brought to the public's attention stories about martial, 'democratic' women in Thai history.<sup>63</sup> In the 1940s and 1950s, under Prime Minister Phibun, the major ideological impetus for the new government was to uproot the socio-political basis of the absolutist period and to win popular support for their new political ideology. Phibun's government in 1939 'launched [a nation-building program] to ensure the ideological and political survival of one political system against another.'<sup>64</sup> Women and men were integrated into the new state in gender specific ways, not all of which were new to the post-1932 government but rather shared similarities with the absolutist state of the early twentieth century. For instance, Phibun desired to build a political foundation based on principles of class equality, so he decided to abolish the system of honorific titles in May 1942 on the grounds that they were reminiscent of feudalistic, anachronistic privileges and that the ideal of 'equality before the law' rendered them obsolete.<sup>65</sup> Tellingly, he allowed the system of honorific titles for women to remain intact. The new government banned the women's newspaper, *Ying Thai*, in late 1932 for publishing an article considered a danger to public order. One wonders if the problematic article was that which opposed women becoming candidates in the 1932 elections. The editors thought it would not guarantee equal treatment for all women, and would instead only assist elite women. They advocated social change as a necessary adjunct to political changes.<sup>66</sup> Barmé notes that after the closure of *Ying Thai* media discussions of gender issues were depoliticized.<sup>67</sup>

The new government's contradictory impulses on gender and politics serve to moderate more enthusiastic interpretations of 1932. It is perhaps unfair to expect quantifiable changes in educational and occupational opportunities for women after 1932. It was, after all, a symbolic watershed. Its significance rested not so much in the changes in material lives but in the symbolic gesture that women were considered political citizens from the beginning of Siam's democratic, non-absolutist era.

## **Conclusion**

These discursive, political and legal continuities suggest the need to reconsider the centrality for women's history of the 1932 overthrow of the absolute monarchy in Siam's historiography. A history that systematically integrates gender into a study of 1932 would measure the extent to which the 'revolution' was revolutionary for individuals on the basis of gender. It would also consciously decentre Eurocentric narratives of political modernity that prioritize political suffrage and rights in evaluating democratic states. These are not insignificant for women's history in Thailand, but perhaps are granted too great a weight at the expense of localized indicators of change in the lives of women. Similarly, a gendered political history would be careful not to overvalue the contributions of the monarchy as has occurred in evaluations of the case of Amdaeng Müan. Her

rehabilitation since the late 1940s coincided with the rehabilitation of the monarchy as a power in Thai politics. This forces us to ask whether the selection of 'women worthies' is based on their ability to make the monarchy central. The task of writing women's history in Thailand must take as its starting point the goal of decentring the monarchy and Eurocentric standards of progress. Instead, we must look locally and contextually for gendered frameworks of meaning that are not reductively exploited to glorify national politics or the monarchy.

## Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Teri Caraway and Thanet Aphornsuvan for their insightful and challenging comments on earlier drafts.
- 2 This remains true both before and after 1932: coups, countercoups, attempted coups, and military dictatorships have limited people's experience with directly electing politicians who exercise effective power.
- 3 For analyses of European modernity and historicism, see D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000; D.P. Gaonkar, 'On Alternative Modernities,' *Public Culture*, vol. 11, 1, 1999, 1–18; and P. Van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- 4 I have used the following published and unpublished sources in this general overview of women's histories. Amara Pongsapich, *Occasional Papers on Women in Thailand*, 3, Bangkok: Women's Studies Programme, Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute, 1988; Bhassorn Limanonda, 'Exploring Women's Status in Contemporary Thailand,' in L. Edwards and M. Roces (eds), *Women in Asia: Tradition, Modernity and Globalisation*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000, pp. 247–64; Chali Iamkrasin, 'Sao phu su phua sithi satri samai ro si,' *Muang thai samai kon*, Bangkok: Thamasan, 1991, pp. 31–7; Darunee Tantiwiranond and S.R. Pandey, *Changing Gender Relations in Thailand*, Rangsit, Pathumthani, Bangkok: Women's Action and Resource Initiative, Working Paper 3, 1999; Jittima Pornarun, 'Kanriakrong sithi satri nai sangkhom thai pho so 2489–2519,' MA dissertation, Chulalongkorn University, 1995; Khin Thitsa, *Providence and Prostitution: Image and Reality for Women in Buddhist Thailand*, London: Change International Reports, 1980; Lamphan Nuambunlue, 'Sithi lae nathi khong satri tam kotmai thai nai samai krung ratanokosin,' MA dissertation, Chulalongkorn University, 1976; Tamara Loos, 'Gender Adjudicated: Translating Modern Legal Subjects in Siam,' PhD dissertation, Ithaca: Cornell University, 1999; Siriphon Skrobanek, 'Kan riakrong sithi satri khong ying thai (2398–2475),' *Satritat*, vol. 1, 3, 1983, 28–35; Supatra Masdit, *Khunying Politics in Thailand with Special Reference to the Role of Women*, Singapore: The Institute of Policy Studies, IPS Regional Speakers Lecture Series 4, 1991; Suteera Thomson and Maytinee Bhongsej, *Putting Women's Concerns on the Political Agenda*, Bangkok: Gender and Development Research Institute, 1995; *Khruangmai haeng khwamrungruang khu saphap haeng satri: Chalompkrakiat 60 phansa somdetphranangcaosirikit phraboromarachininat*, Bangkok: Somakhom banthit satri thang kotmai haeng prathet thai, 1992 [hereafter *Khruangmai*].
- 5 Some historians see the pre-modern period as a dark age while others regard it as a golden age when women in Thailand enjoyed a high status compared to women in China and India. For an example of the former interpretation see Amara, op. cit., and for an example of the latter, see Bhassorn, op. cit. General-

izations of this sort, while they might be abstractly true in such a comparative context, are ahistoric and lack the precision necessary to make a serious evaluation of what 'high status' might have meant. They also fail to acknowledge class-based hierarchies that cross gender lines.

- 6 The treaty, signed initially with Britain and later with about fourteen foreign countries, opened Siam's economy to international trade and granted treaty partners extraterritoriality and residence rights in Siam. It also stimulated rice production for export, which increased the value of land and rearranged the relationship between peasant farmers and their lords. Increasing numbers of people became small holders cultivating rice for trade and prided themselves away from relationships of indebted servitude with local elite. It is less clear how these changes affected gender relations and women's economic position in rural areas.
- 7 *Khriangmai*, op. cit. This volume reprinted a series of historical and contemporary laws, essays, proclamations, and poetry about women, even those written after the end of the absolute monarchy in 1932, as part of Queen Sirikit's sixtieth birthday celebration. This act of appropriation on the behalf of the royal family of historical events that transformed the status of women is not unusual, but is part of the political economy of scholarship as it operates today in Thai academe.
- 8 Siriphon, op. cit., p. 29.
- 9 Amdaeng Muan is discussed in most studies of women in Thai history, in some cases more critically than others. See for examples of the range of treatment of her case: Amara, op. cit., p. 64; 'Amdaengmuan kap Nairit,' film distributed by Right Home Video, Bangkok, 1995; Chali, op. cit., pp. 31-7; Junko Koizumi, 'From a Water Buffalo to a Human Being: Women and the Family in Siamese History,' in B.W. Andaya (ed.), *Other Pasts: Women, Gender and History in Early Modern Southeast Asia*, Honolulu: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, 2000, 254-68; *Khriangmai*, op. cit., pp. 73-5; Lamphan, op. cit., pp. 98-101; Loos, op. cit., pp. 203-12; Seni Pramoj, 'King Mongkut as a Legislator,' *Journal of the Siam Society* IV, Selected Articles, 1959, 203-37; Siriphon, op. cit., pp. 28-35.
- 10 Seni Pramoj's account is lengthier than most others. His version is allegedly that of King Mongkut's. In it, Amdaeng Muan's parents knew that she was in a relationship with Nai Rit, which is different from other accounts of the law that indicate her parents did not know. While it is possible that her parents knew, the fact if true would alter King Mongkut's role. Her parents would appear even more inhumanely money hungry, which constructs King Mongkut as an even more sympathetic ruler.
- 11 For a complete recounting of the details in her petition, see Chapter 5 of Loos, op. cit.
- 12 Nai Rit may have had to pay Nai Phu and Amdaeng Muan's parents' compensation unless it was found that her parents had sold her to Nai Phu, in which case her parents had to compensate Nai Phu.
- 13 The relative social position of every individual was specified in laws (that date to the fifteenth century) that delineated one's social position in numerical units called sakdina. Sakdina translates as 'field power' or 'control over the rice field.' The sakdina units, which the king allotted to each of his subjects according to rank and position, may have corresponded to the units of land and number of people to which the subject was entitled. Theoretically, the higher an individual's sakdina, the larger the individual's retinue of subordinate individuals and the more land possessed by that individual.
- 14 'Prakat phraratchabanyat *lakpha*, c.s. 1227,' in *Khriangmai*, op. cit., pp. 64-9.

- Also, 'Prakat phraratchabanyat laksana *lakpha*,' *Prachum prakat ratchakan thi 4*, Bangkok: Khuru Sapha, 1961, pp. 102–17.
- 15 Four hundred sakdina was the cut off between *phrai* (commoner) and *that* (slaves), on the one hand, and *khunnang* (noble officials) and *cao* (royalty), on the other. Those with ranks above four hundred had access to the king, obtained legal privileges such as the right to appoint a representative to take their place in proceedings, and had other social benefits. Those below the rank of four hundred were subject to corvée labour and military conscription and had no direct access to the king or the law.
  - 16 Lamphan, op. cit., pp. 98–9.
  - 17 King Mongkut wrote that 'parents do not own their sons and daughters in the same way that one owns beasts of burden for which they may set a price and sell as they please; nor [is the situation similar to] a master owning a slave with a body price which the owner may receive in the event of the slave's sale.' *Khriiangmai*, op. cit., p. 66.
  - 18 *Khriiangmai*, op. cit., p. 69.
  - 19 Sathian Laiyalak et al. (comp.), 'Kotmai ni müa phikhra du müan phuying pen khwai phuchai pen khon pai,' *Prachum kotmai pracamsok (PKPS)* 7, 1935, pp. 247–51.
  - 20 Ibid., p. 248. The case of Amdaeng Can, explained in a petition similar to Amdaeng Müan's to King Mongkut, was cited as a precedent for the law prohibiting men from selling wives. Siriphon Skrobenek, a woman's rights advocate in the 1990s, writes that 'this was the first time women demanded rights they should obtain on the basis of being a person.' Her statement should be tempered by the class-based assumptions in the new laws. Siriphon, op. cit., p. 29.
  - 21 Sathian, op. cit., pp. 68–9.
  - 22 King Mongkut's laws on *lakpha* were motivated by a concern to maintain a social hierarchy in the face of a changing political and economic environment. This becomes clearer when examining these decrees and commands in the economic context of the times. According to the normative narrative of Siam's history, King Mongkut was forced to open Siam to international trade because of the 1855 Bowring Treaty. Pasuk and Baker have criticized the normative version of 1855 in two ways: first, they have exposed as minimal the actual role of King Mongkut as merely one player among royal and aristocratic factions; and second, they have flipped our commonplace understandings of the monarch as the victim of Western aggression by revealing that a faction of Siam's elites preemptively enacted economic changes that were merely rubber stamped by the treaty. In other words, a segment of Siam's elite had political and economic motivations to invite Bowring to Siam in 1855 to sign a treaty that merely endorsed changes they had already initiated. In this reinterpretation, both the imperialist West and Siam's monarch are decentred: neither Sir John Bowring nor King Mongkut asserted control over this event. Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker, *Thailand: Economy and Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
  - 23 These are the dates of the reproduction and publication of Amdaeng Müan's story to a sizable public. Her story has been reproduced countless times in various legal histories and pro-monarchical histories of women, but I have selected these dates as concentrated efforts to publicize her case to a particular audience (foreigners) or to a larger public (through a king's writing or through a popular film).
  - 24 Under the title, 'Amdaengmüan kap Nairit,' film, op. cit.; Chali, op. cit. pp. 31–7.
  - 25 Seni, op. cit. The debate between Western feminists who question King Mongkut's attitude toward women and others who felt Mongkut's character

- had been maligned is summarized by Susan Morgan in her critical introduction to Anna Leonowens, *The Romance of the Harem*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991, pp. ix–xxxix.
- 26 For instance, in 1866 King Mongkut issued a royal command that forbade people from adorning their children with jewellery because criminals with gambling debts and slaves would be tempted to murder the children in order to steal the valuables. He naturalized a slave's motivation to kill for economic gain when he wrote that parents who allowed slaves to care for richly adorned children 'entrust[ed] a fish to a cat or sugar to ants.' National Library, Bangkok, *Rama IV*, 1866, no. 103.
- 27 This would ultimately depend on how one defines 'Asia.' The Cook Islands implemented universal suffrage in 1893; many people today count New Zealand as part of 'Asia.' Mongolia was granted the vote in 1924. See C. Daley and M. Nolan, *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*, New York: New York University Press, 1994, pp. 349–52.
- 28 Susan Blackburn, 'Winning the Vote for Women in Indonesia,' *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, 29, 1999, 207.
- 29 Chakrabarty, op. cit., p. 4.
- 30 For an excellent discussion of the effect that asymmetrical power relations has on the ideas transmitted through colonial contact, see Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London: Routledge, 1992. Pratt explains the concept of transculturation as describing 'how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for.' (p. 6)
- 31 Chakrabarty, op. cit., p. 4.
- 32 I should note here that the books' editors are also aware of the difficulty of writing about 'rights' and 'women's suffrage' without falling into the historicist trap of envisioning Europe as the model of political modernity, where women's rights were first manifest. It is not their intention to re-center the West, but to reveal the existence of women's political movements historically across the globe.
- 33 We do not have access to the opinions of women from the lower classes but can surmise from the phenomenal rise in prostitution in Bangkok that women without access to education or adequate employment had few other alternatives to support themselves aside from marriage or prostitution. For a discussion of prostitution, see Dararat Mettarikanon, 'Sopheni kap naiyobai rathaban thai phó só 2411–2503,' MA dissertation, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, 1983; and S. Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex and Popular Culture in Siam*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002.
- 34 Scholars writing about women's and gender history most frequently cited these three issues. Here I summarize the work on women's history written by Amara, op. cit., Barmé, op. cit., Jittima, op. cit., and Siriphon, op. cit.
- 35 Selections from the People's Party Announcement made on 24 June 1932. The English translation comes from Pridi Banomyong, *Pridi by Pridi: Selected Writings on Life, Politics, and Economy*, in C. Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit (trans. and intro.), Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2000, p. 72. For the original Thai announcement, see Charnvit Kasetsiri, *2475 Kanpotiwatsayam*, Bangkok: The Foundation for the Promotion of Social Sciences and Humanities Textbooks Project, 2000, pp. 125–6.
- 36 I have summarized the narrative provided by Pasuk and Baker, op. cit., pp. 244–66.
- 37 Men and women voted for a village representative, who then elected a tambon representative, who then voted for the Assembly member. Pridi, op. cit., pp. 74–5.



- 38 The provisional constitution of 1932 ensured that all MPs would be elected after over half of the population obtained an elementary education or within ten years of the implementation of the constitution. The Second World War allowed Siam's leaders to push back that date.
- 39 Thomson and Maytinee, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
- 40 Since 1932, only 2.8 per cent of MPs have been women, totalling 41 by 1991. For the same years, only 1.9 per cent of the Senate members have been female and only four women have served in the Cabinet. After the Parliamentary elections of July 1988, women accounted for 3.5 per cent of members of Parliament (10 of 357). See Supatra, *op. cit.*, pp. 16–18. In 1993 the first female provincial governor was appointed. In 1995, women constituted 2.7 per cent of Governors (75 provinces); 0.1 per cent of District Heads (774 districts); and 0.2 per cent of Assistant District Heads (7877 positions); 7 per cent of prosecutors, judges, and judge-trainees. See Bhassorn, *op. cit.*, p. 259. In terms of women's positions in the bureaucracy, there were 390,019 women and 326,126 men working as civil servants in 1987, but only 6.7 per cent of those women worked at senior administrative levels are women. Supatra, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
- 41 The list of scholars who have focused on the rise and fall of the absolute monarchy, on the events of 1932, and on their aftermath is long and impressive. Published works on the period leading up to 1932 that were used in this chapter include: S. Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok*, *op. cit.*; S. Barmé, 'Towards a Social History of Bangkok: Gender, Class and Popular Culture in the Siamese Capital – 1905–1940,' PhD dissertation, The ANU, 1997; B. Batson, *The End of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984; Chaiyan Rajchagool, *The Rise and Fall of the Thai Absolute Monarchy*, Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994; M. Copeland, 'Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam,' Ph.D. dissertation, The ANU, 1993; Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead, 'The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism,' PhD dissertation, SOAS, 2000; Pasuk and Baker, *op. cit.*; and J. Stowe, *Siam Becomes Thailand: A Story of Intrigue*, Honolulu: The University of Hawai'i Press, 1991. Others have published directly on 1932, its leaders, and its aftermath. The authors consulted here include: Charnvit Kasetsiri, *op. cit.*; K. Landon, *Thailand in Transition: A Brief Survey of Cultural Trends in the Five Years since the Revolution of 1932*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939; Kobkua Suwannathat-Pian, *Thailand's Durable Premier: Phibun Through Three Decades, 1932–1957*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995; Malinee Khumsupha, 'Sithi satri nai khwamkhit khong pridi phanomyong,' *Warasan Thammasat*, vol. 25, 1, 1999, 91–104; Nakkharin Mektrairat, *Kan-patiwat sayam pho' so' 2475*, Bangkok: The Foundation for the Social Sciences and Humanities, 1992; Pridi, *op. cit.*; and C. Reynolds (ed.), *National Identity and Its Defenders: Thailand, 1939–1989*, Monash Papers on Southeast Asia 25. Clayton: Monash University Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991. Of all of the accounts of 1932, only Barmé and Malinee attempt to apply a gender analysis while the others write a more traditional political history. The other accounts treat the class constituency and motivations of various groups vying for power in Bangkok. Kobkua's study of Phibun similarly treats personalities without gendering her analysis of his personal life or political ideology except in the segment on socio-cultural reforms. The omission of a gender analysis persists in accounts of contemporary Thai politics. For example, Hewison's 1997 edited volume that assesses approaches to the study of Thai politics and surveys enduring institutions (military, bureaucracy, religion, monarchy) omits gender from its pages. K. Hewison (ed.), *Political Change in Thailand: Democracy and Participation*, London: Routledge, 1997.

- 42 C. Daley and M. Nolan, 'International Feminist Perspectives on Suffrage: An Introduction,' in C. Daley and M. Nolan (eds), *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives*, New York: New York University Press, 1994, p. 9.
- 43 This insight was solidified through conversations with Professor Teri Caraway. Susan Blackburn has also considered similar issues in colonial and postcolonial Indonesia. S. Blackburn, op. cit., p. 215.
- 44 The significance of gender as opposed to other forms of difference has long been debated in the scholarship of Southeast Asia. See S. Errington, 'Recasting Sex, Gender, and Power: A Theoretical and Regional Overview,' in J. Atkinson and S. Errington (eds), *Power and Difference: Gender in Island Southeast Asia*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990, pp. 1–58; Loos, op. cit.
- 45 Nakkharin, op. cit.; Pasuk and Baker, op. cit.; Pridi, op. cit.
- 46 The Local Administration Act was promulgated in 1914 and lifted in 1982, when immediately at least two women were elected to the position of *phuyaiban*. Jittima, op. cit., p. 41.
- 47 Malinee, op. cit., p. 94; Jittima, op. cit., p. 41.
- 48 Malinee, op. cit., p. 94.
- 49 Jittima, op. cit., p. 42.
- 50 M. Roces, 'Negotiating modernities: Filipino women 1970–2000,' in L. Edwards and M. Roces (eds), *Women in Asia: Tradition, Modernity and Globalisation*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000, pp. 112–38.
- 51 The information about Thianwan comes from Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok*, op. cit., pp. 17, 23–6.
- 52 Ibid., p. 24.
- 53 Daughters are not mentioned.
- 54 King Vajiravudh, 'Khlon tit ló,' in *Plukcai süapa lae khlon tit ló*, Bangkok: Borisat Mahachai Kanphim, 1951, p. 114.
- 55 King Vajiravudh, op. cit., p. 115.
- 56 Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok*, op. cit., and Copeland, op. cit.
- 57 Amara, op. cit., and Siriphon, op. cit.
- 58 Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok*, op. cit., p. 135; Barmé, 'Towards a Social History of Bangkok,' op. cit., p. 109.
- 59 Bhassorn, op. cit., p. 255.
- 60 Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok*, op. cit., Amara, op. cit., Siriphon, op. cit.
- 61 Siriphon, op. cit., p. 31.
- 62 The first woman was Nangsao Raem Phromobon (Khunying Raem Phromobon Bunyaprasop). Her father was the Police Colonel and Chief of the Police Department during the reigns of Rama VI and VII, making him well placed to secure his daughter an opportunity to study law. He had close connections with the Minister of Justice, Maha Amatek Caophraya Phichaiyat, who accepted Nangsao Raem into law school. Jittima, op. cit., pp. 35–6.
- 63 S. Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok*, op. cit., pp. 233–43.
- 64 Kobkua, op. cit., p. 104.
- 65 Kobkua, op. cit., p. 123.
- 66 Amara, op. cit. Other women's journals used the new rights offered to women in 1932 as an opportunity to catalyze women's rights activism.
- 67 S. Barmé, *Woman, Man, Bangkok*, op. cit., p. 232.

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## 9 Tradition, law and the female suffrage movement in India

*Gail Pearson*

On India's Independence in 1947, universal adult franchise was pronounced as a foundation stone of the new Indian nation. All Indian women were recognised within the newly independent nation as equal citizens with men in the eyes of the law. However, the winning of women's suffrage in India was not simply a product of nationalist independence struggles. Indian women's franchise emerged from a complex matrix of governance narratives operating in India from the late nineteenth century through to the mid twentieth century. These included: modernist aspirations current among a select group of Indian women; internationalist perspectives on the women's suffrage struggle circulating among British women living within the colonial regime governing India; and the prioritisation of the rightfulness of Law prominent within many debates conducted between elite Indian men and the British imperialists. Indian nationalism, British paternalism, suffragist internationalism combined with tensions generated from India's class, caste and religious diversity to establish a uniquely Indian history of women's suffrage.

Central to this history is the construction of 'women' simultaneously as modern Indian citizens and as representatives of 'Indian-ness' and 'tradition.' If women were to become 'citizens' their 'traditional' roles – as religiously dutiful wives, inheritors of an ancient mythic past, bearers of the virtues of a pre-colonial social order and preservers of caste and community – would need renegotiation. Throughout the nineteenth century English men and Indian men invented this 'tradition' of the Indian past to explain and provide a basis for action in the Indian present.<sup>1</sup> 'Women' were identified with tradition; religion was elevated to law; and the glories of the past were contrasted with a degraded present. As this 'tradition' was expounded, 'women' were simultaneously and contradictorily detached from the state through the policy of non-interference with religion and legalised through the policy of social reform by legislation. However, the 'tradition' that emerged in debates on social and legal reform and the advances that were described as resulting therein, in fact concerned only upper-caste and upper-class women.

The Indian women's suffrage movement spanned the twenty-year

period between 1917 and 1937 and the women who argued for the vote envisaged women citizens participating in the building of a new, independent state. However, ironically it was the colonial state that first awarded a limited section of Indian women the right to participate in the colonial legislative assemblies. The history of the right of women to vote is inextricably linked with the series of constitutional reforms that fostered a future liberal democratic state within the imperial carapace. These reforms gradually increased the numbers and categories of persons who could participate as voters or legislators. The evolutionary nature of the women's suffrage gains involved consideration of regional and religious sensitivities as well as negotiating tensions between the colonial administrators and the independence activists.

There was no male adult franchise until independence. However, from the end of the first decade of the twentieth century a series of reforms was set in train that was to alter the meaning of Indian citizenship and national governance. In 1909 a set of legislative reforms increased the numbers of men eligible for elected office – but no provisions were made for women. These 1909 reforms also introduced separate electorates for Muslims. There were further legislative changes in 1919 but neither did these instantly provide women with the vote – instead each Provincial Council, in recognition of India's regional diversity, was granted the power to decide women's suffrage itself. Accordingly, over the course of the 1920s, various Provincial Councils passed resolutions in piecemeal fashion that removed the sex disqualification on voting provided a woman owned sufficient property. If a woman was entitled to vote for the Provincial Council she could also vote for the Central Legislative Assembly. Later in the 1920s the bar preventing women standing for election or nomination as Members of the Councils was removed.

During the 1930s there was an added urgency to the debate when the 1935 Government of India Act further expanded the franchise for men and women. It provided that women could vote if they qualified on one of a number of conditions – ownership of property in their own right, attainment of education and literacy, and wifehood if the husband were qualified to vote. However, one further provision indicated an important shift in gendered notions of citizenship. Some seats in the Provincial Legislatures were reserved specifically for women. Only women could stand for election in these seats. The first elections under this new constitutional arrangement were held in 1937. The reserved seats ensured that women were elected, encouraged the election of women to seats not specifically reserved and set a pattern of strong 'women' legislators and government ministers.<sup>2</sup>

This period of gaining the vote for women took place against the backdrop of debates and negotiations as to which other groups – Muslims, lower castes, educated, labour and rural interests, should gain the right to vote or the right to separate electorates. It also occurred in the context of

the ebb and flow of the nationalist movement, dominated by the Indian National Congress, formed in 1885. The significance of the 1937 election, the first held on the basis of the 1935 Constitution, is that it was contested by the Congress which for many years had engaged in civil disobedience and refused to participate in the gradual evolution of responsible government. It swept the elections so that for the most part those women elected were allied with the Congress. This was the party that led Indian politics for the first few decades after Independence.

The suffragists' success developed as an 'administrative evolution' – through targeted lobbying that eventually resulted in the passage of new laws. It did not involve violent street demonstrations or dramatic individual protest, as had been often the case elsewhere in the world and the Asian region. The boundaries of Indian citizenship were addressed through debates on proposed constitutional reforms and the gradual 'Indianization' of the colonial government bureaucracy. As we will see below, the preoccupation with legal avenues for reform reflected the Indian elite's generalised enthusiasm for 'rule of law.'

The idea that women could be in government received mixed reception among India's male population: some strongly supported the women politicians and others vigorously opposed the change. Gandhi supported votes for women even while refusing to cooperate with constitutional negotiations. Motilal Nehru, father of the first Prime Minister of independent India and grandfather of the female Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi failed to support women's votes at first but later did so.<sup>3</sup> S.G. Bhutto, progenitor of a formidable female Prime Minister of Pakistan opposed the removal of the sex disqualification.<sup>4</sup> Men who opposed the vote for women did so largely because of perceptions about maintaining tradition and religious customs. They feared that voting women would be likened to prostitutes or feared that women would not vote independently of their husbands or fathers thus strengthening the electoral chances of more numerous groups. Men who supported the vote believed in liberal democratic virtues, and did not fear that votes for women would tear the fabric of society binding Indians together. During these decades a broad, publicly-espoused demand for Indian women's suffrage intersected with complex and ongoing conversations on tradition, nationalism and the potential for greater democracy within India as a whole. The debate on the participation of women in the political process proceeded alongside the debate on the future shape of the Indian polity.<sup>5</sup>

### **Indian nationalism and suffrage struggles**

The suffragist movement was closely connected with the nationalist movement from its inception. Prominent suffragists such as Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu were both at different times President of the Indian National Congress, the former in 1917 and the latter in 1925. In 1916



Annie Besant established one of the two Home Rule Leagues. Annie Besant (1847–1933) was an Irish Theosophist based in Madras. Before arriving in India in 1893 she was an advocate of women's rights, birth control and was a staunch anti-imperialist. In India she endorsed the 'golden age'-view of the ancient Hindu past, learnt Sanskrit and defended certain contentious social customs. She did not become an advocate of Indian women's rights until after 1913 when she called India to 'Wake Up' – the title of her book on the topic.<sup>6</sup> Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949) started life as the talented daughter of a prominent family in the independent State of Hyderabad and was famous for matriculating to Madras University at the age of twelve. In 1895 at the age of sixteen her parents sent her to Cambridge in the care of Annie Besant to circumvent an intercaste marriage, which she promptly made on her return to India a few years later in 1898. She started out in public life making speeches on social reform issues and women's education and first addressed the Indian National Congress in 1906.<sup>7</sup> Suffragists pointed to the participation of women in the Congress to justify their claim to the vote.<sup>8</sup> The presence of such prominent nationalists in the suffrage movement gave it legitimacy and drew it close to a wider political process.

Indian historiography is overwhelmingly nationalist in ideological outlook. This creates problems for scholars seeking to excavate the history of women's suffrage in India. Unsurprisingly, Indian historiography has emphasised the role of the nationalist struggle in gaining *swaraj* (self-government). There are a number of reasons why women's suffrage – as a distinct and separate movement – has been under-emphasised within this historical practice. Indian women first won the right to vote in colonial legislatures at a time when the Congress nationalists generally were engaged in non-cooperation with these legislative bodies. This timing suggests a 'less than instrumentalist role' for these nationalists. In Bombay the lobbying was left to women associated with the Liberal Federation and non-political women's groups. In addition, narratives of women's suffrage raise uncomfortable questions about the involvement of British women in the success of Indian women in gaining the vote. The engagement of both Indian and British women with international suffrage groups also dilutes the nationalist vision of India 'independently' gaining modernity and a gender-neutral political Independence. India's women's suffrage success relates a story of global interaction and responsiveness to international trends that reduces the national ideal of a 'bordered' victory of Indian Independence. Moreover, discreet narratives of women's suffrage victories undermine the project of embodying 'tradition' in 'women' that elite Indian men and British colonial administrators had devoted decades of legal debate to constructing. Finally, in Indian nationalist historiography women's suffrage stories also stand to remind Indians of pre-Gandhian, male nationalist participation in the colonial British Imperial Councils – a collaborationist period in the political past that current nationalists often

wish to erase.<sup>9</sup> To write the history of the vote for both men and women is also to write the history of the compromises between different caste groups and different religions in the staged expansion of representative democracy.

### **Expanding women's electoral participation**

The colonial state that the women sought to participate in (and participate in dismantling) built itself partially in the image of its British counterpart. It was a bureaucratic state with a professional civil service that aspired to uphold the 'rule of law.' India was divided into Provinces ruled by a Governor and at the apex stood the Viceroy, representative of the Crown. Municipal Commissioners governed the cities. Assisting these Offices were advisory Councils, to which English men and Indian men were nominated and later elected. Much of the politics from the second half of the nineteenth century concerned discussion of issues of public concern including the demand for greater Indian representation at each of these levels of government. Alterations in the electoral laws and regulations on government participation applied at each of the various administrative levels were central to the nationalist struggle as they were to the women's suffrage struggle. Colonial India was an administrative bureaucracy and political change was first and foremost contested within this bureaucratic custom.

Hence, the earliest nationalist demands were for greater participation in the deliberative bodies of the colonial state in a bid to gain greater access for Indian men over the formation of Law. Later, in the nationalist struggle, when activists deliberately engaged in non-cooperation (1920) and then civil disobedience (1930), they still did not interrogate notions of Indian 'tradition' or the value of 'rule of law.' Nationalists challenged laws but relied on the rule of law. Indeed, many prominent nationalists, such as Gandhi, and Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru were trained in the British legal system. Women's suffrage proponents similarly developed their program for action within this legalistic tradition. The evolution of their success demonstrates the power of rule of law within colonial India.

The earliest representative bodies in colonial India were the Municipal Councils. In Bombay the 1872 draft bill to reform the municipality initially proposed that ratepayers should elect one tenth of the members. However, when finally passed by the colonial authorities it provided for fifty percent elected members.<sup>10</sup> Women were disqualified from voting in these new semi-democratic bodies. In 1900 it was reported that the ban on women's participation was lifted with an amendment to the Bombay Municipal Act (1888) wherein ratepayers, regardless of sex, were permitted to vote.<sup>11</sup> However, an interchange in the Legislative Council suggests that some women had been voting in the Bombay municipal elections for many years.<sup>12</sup> In 1919 women voted in the Madras municipality.<sup>13</sup> Elite

class interests superseded any prejudices based on gender as propertied women were permitted to exercise their influence over government in key urban areas. Class-based franchise legislation had caused tremendous upheaval in the British women's suffrage movement whereas in India elite Indian men and the ruling male colonial authorities were less troubled by class-based concerns. Although Indian women were entitled to vote in municipal elections in a number of provinces it took longer for them to stand as Municipal Councillors. In 1919 a motion to allow women to be elected to the Bombay Municipal Corporation was narrowly defeated but passed in 1920.<sup>14</sup> Certainly in 1923 there are reports of women, including Avantikabai Gokhale, a prominent Gandhian nationalist who stood for election, being feted by the network of women's associations.<sup>15</sup> In 1919 the Madras Municipality was in favour of allowing women to be elected but the Government of Madras later vetoed the decision.<sup>16</sup>

The extent of women's actual participation in Municipal elections is difficult to determine. Two reports from the Southborough Committee (a review body that was exploring the expansion of Indian franchise nearly two decades later in 1918 and 1919), indicated that women's right to vote was sparingly exercised except in Bombay City.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, some elite women did participate. Borthwick cites a report of women in *purdah* arriving by carriage to vote in the Burdwan (Bengal) municipal election in the late nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, in the Punjab 'no one had thought of asking' to vote in any Municipal elections even though they were legally allowed to participate.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, in the Central Provinces women in *purdah*, that is 'respectable women,' did not vote. The Southborough Committee queried whether those who did exercise the right to vote cast their vote independently. The member of the Berar Provincial Congress Committee giving evidence was opposed to women's suffrage on this ground but had no evidence as to whether this was the case or not.<sup>20</sup>

In 1909 constitutional developments and further legislative change incrementally broadened the potential for women's political participation in India. The Morley Minto reforms, as they came to be known, were a compromise of elite, western-educated Indians demanding greater say in the legislative Councils and the British colonial authorities to ensure that weaker, as yet un-represented groups, were not oppressed.<sup>21</sup> In the lead up to the 1909 reforms, the vexed question of 'who should be represented' in the provincial Councils and the Imperial Legislative Council, was central. The interests of 'women,' a few of whom already voted in Municipal elections, were on one interpretation overlooked, on another, deliberately excluded.

Representative of those who saw no reason to alter the status of women specifically within the legislation was the following comment:

The suffragette is the product of the struggle to exist in England: there will be no such struggle in India, for the wife and the daughter

share the fortunes of the household, whatever they may be, and practically the only career open to the Indian women is that of wife. And as for politics, the educated men are so far away from getting the votes for themselves that the idea that women in India could ever imagine any such power being lodged in their hands is but the vainest of dreams.<sup>22</sup>

Published in the *Indian Ladies Magazine*, a widely circulated English-language journal from Madras, the article advocated remaining with the status quo, which gave voice (and vote) to a few wealthy, landed, urban-dwelling women only.

Ultimately, when The Indian Councils Act (1909) (known as the Morley–Minto reforms) was finally passed it inadvertently increased the woman vote. The Act increased the number of elected members on the Imperial Legislative Council, the advisory body to the Viceroy, and also the elected members on the provincial councils. These reforms created indirect electorates and reserved seats. There were separate constituencies in which only Muslims could vote or be elected. Other seats were reserved for *zamindars* (large rural landholders) and British industrialists.<sup>23</sup> One of the constituencies to be represented involved the British Indian Association, an early voluntary association including large landholders. Women were members of this Association in the United Provinces, in the heartland of the Gangetic plain, and under its existing rules could vote by proxy. The Provincial Government sought clarification on the legality of women's voting through their membership of this Association. The result was that female members of the Association were stopped from voting at elections for the Imperial Legislative Council along with any other women who may have qualified on some other basis.<sup>24</sup>

Almost a decade later, in December 1917, a further opportunity for expanding the women's vote presented itself. Confronted with the exigency of war and increasing contestation about the colonial endeavour in general, the British government's Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, declared in the House of Commons that the policy of the government was 'the gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire.'<sup>25</sup> He travelled to India and accompanied by the Viceroy Lord Chelmsford gathered information on how best to proceed with this 'gradual development of self-governing institutions.' Various interest groups around the nation presented their case for representation. Peasants in western India demanded separate electorates.<sup>26</sup> Bengal Muslims demanded representation in proportion to their numbers and the continuation of separate electorates.<sup>27</sup> South Indian non-Brahmans wanted communal representation.<sup>28</sup> 'Women' also asked for representation – almost by accident.

Over the preceding two years women in India – both British and Indian

– had begun lobbying for improvements in education opportunities for women and girls. The modernist project required educated women to promote social and health reform, new social relations within the family, the education of their children and awareness of public issues. By the beginning of the twentieth century there were women teachers, doctors and lawyers but the pace and extent of education for women was slow. The first decades of the twentieth century also saw an explosion in the formation of clubs for women. These associations functioned at a purely social level providing a safe place for women to meet outside the family home but they also ran afternoon education classes and provided a training ground for the formal and informal rules of civil society with an array of presidents, secretaries and treasurers, resolutions and minutes. Some associations were linked to caste or community groups, others imitated the all India political and social reform organisations and themselves adopted an all India format. It was natural that the demand for education and the vote should coalesce. Women wanted more women to be educated for the social good; women also wanted formal political participation to influence public affairs for the same reason.

In July 1915 a group of Englishwomen and Indian civil servants sent a memorial followed by a deputation to the Secretary of State asking for a Committee to enquire into girls' education. When no committee was forthcoming, the network of Bombay's women's associations sent a memorial to the Viceroy saying that the pace of progress in girls' education was too slow. This memorial outlined a program for action. Pressure on the central authorities to improve education was building. In its response to a query from the Government of India on the matter the Bombay Government wrote: 'the political expansion of India, that is now taking place, should, so far as possible be accompanied, if not preceded, by an educational expansion, and this expansion should not be confined to men and boys.'<sup>29</sup> The issue of improving educational opportunities for girls did not disappear and indeed, enhanced literacy was soon presented as a solution to a broad range of social ills relating to women. For example, in 1917 'women' led by Mrs Jaijee Petit, whose husband had helped fund Gandhi in South Africa, lobbied the Viceroy on the problems of female indentured labour among Fijian Indians. The Viceroy advised Mrs Jaijee Petit to assist her fellow Indian women through enhancing their educational opportunities.<sup>30</sup> Women around India responded to this challenge by intensifying their activities in a host of voluntary philanthropic associations.

One of the new voluntary associations established in 1917 was the Women's Indian Association (WIA), based in Adyar, Madras. This was also the headquarters of the Theosophical Society – an occult religion that believed in the 'brotherhood' of all people. This group was to have a significant role in expanding women's formal political potential in India. The women behind the establishment of the WIA were two British women

strongly committed to India and its development – Mrs Dorothy Jinarajadasa and Mrs Margaret Cousins. Both were Theosophists and closely connected with Annie Besant (who was the first President of the Theosophical Society and of the WIA) and her Home Rule League. Cousins was a music graduate and Irish ‘suffragette’ who had worked with British suffragists (Mrs Pankhurst) and had arrived in India only two years earlier.<sup>31</sup> Dorothy was an English suffragist married to an Indian. Both absorbed the ideal of a united India. The WIA was non sectarian and non communal and its initial object was to encourage the self-development and education of women.<sup>32</sup> It quickly built on the all-India connections provided particularly by the Theosophical Society. In Bombay a Theosophist, Mrs Herabai Tata, led the local WIA branch. Its supporters in Bombay were Parsi in ethnic origin and the language of all of its branches was Gujarati. Both Annie Besant and Mrs Cousins were on the Senate of the Indian Women’s University (later SNDT University) set up by D.K. Karve in Pune.<sup>33</sup> Margaret Cousins was quick to grasp the potential of Montagu’s tour of India and proposed a deputation to lobby for funds to expand girls’ education.<sup>34</sup> She was notified that matters pertaining to education were beyond the scope of Montagu’s tour, which was conceived to investigate *political* reforms. Cousins adroitly created a ‘proper’ basis for the WIA deputation – she requested that it discuss the issue of women’s suffrage with Montagu.<sup>35</sup> According to Margaret Cousins her husband provided the suffrage idea when the initial proposal on education was rejected. He suggested: ‘What about votes for women NOW?’ This Cousins-inspired suffrage proposal was accepted for consideration. As a result, both the Viceroy and the British Secretary of State for India met and consulted a group of Indian women to discuss voting rights for Indian women.

This December 1917 deputation to the Secretary of State consisted of fourteen women bearing telegrams from another eight women.<sup>36</sup> The women represented different regions of India and different communities – Brahman, non-Brahman, Muslim, Parsi and Christian. They were linked at this juncture by their commitment to enhancing female education more than dedication to winning the female franchise. The nationalist accounts of the deputation emphasised the role of Sarojini Naidu as leader,<sup>37</sup> and was described in the India Office as comprising eighteen Indian ladies from different parts of India (including Sarojini Naidu) and four European women (including Annie Besant) wearing Indian dress.<sup>38</sup> The report’s reference to ‘English women in Indian dress’ was a coded message about the unreliability of the English women. By wearing Indian dress these European women were perceived to have ‘gone native’ and were therefore an embarrassment to the world of colonial officialdom. In the summary documentation of the 112 addresses to Montagu there was no mention of the women’s deputation.

In the photograph of the delegation the fraught nature of the allegiance between the Indian and British women is evident. Annie Besant sits

in the middle of the group looking directly out of the picture. She is flanked by Sarojini Naidu who sits with eyes lowered staring into the middle distance, her head covered, and her face partially turned away from Annie Besant. Margaret Cousins sits at the feet of Sarojini Naidu and maybe Sarojini's hand is on her shoulder. Herabai Tata is also there. By 1919 Sarojini Naidu would write of Annie Besant: 'The old lady and her troupe are at present touring (England) addressing meetings on India – but as far as India is concerned I think her day is done.'<sup>39</sup>

The WIA activists did not stop at this deputation to Montagu. They also attempted to influence the major nationalist group – the Indian National Congress. Later that year, in December 1917 Annie Besant was elected to preside over the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress. A female suffrage resolution was listed on the agenda at the 1917 meeting but was never actually discussed. Two contemporary explanations were given for this: lack of time,<sup>40</sup> and a defect in the resolution since it recommended partial franchise and appealed to men's chivalry rather than their sense of justice.<sup>41</sup> At this point prior to the announcement of the constitutional reforms intended by Montagu and Chelmsford debating 'votes for



*Figure 9.1* Photograph of the All India Women's Deputation to Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India, 1917. Mrs Sarojini Naidu sits second row, second from left, next to Mrs Annie Besant, who is second row, third from left. From M. Reddi, *One Who Knows, Mrs. Margaret Cousins and Her Work in India* (Madras: Women's Indian Association, 1956).

women' was not an urgent priority for those who placed the item on the agenda. Female suffrage was yet to be politicised in India and drawn into nationalist politics.

It was not until the following year in September 1918, after the British Government had rejected a female franchise as part of the expansion of responsible government in India that the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League passed a resolution supporting votes for women if they qualified for the franchise on the same terms as men. This resolution envisaged a citizenship based on equal political rights between men and women.<sup>42</sup> The September resolution emerged as a result of intense lobbying of nationalist men by WIA members from early in 1918. The WIA had also received statements of support from the Muslim League and the Home Rule League. The argument worked along the lines that it was not politically possible for Indian men to advocate independence for India on the one hand and categorically oppose female suffrage on the other. In March and April 1918 in the lead up to the National resolution the Bombay, Malabar and Madras Provincial conferences passed resolutions in favour of the removal of the sex disqualification and the Provincial Congress Committees of the Central Provinces, the Punjab, Madras, Bombay and the United Provinces passed women's suffrage resolutions.<sup>43</sup> The success of all these resolutions indicated that 'women' were adept at the process of meetings and at working through the bureaucratic Congress hierarchy that imitated that of the colonial government.

After the release of the Montagu report in 1918 (which did not mention the issue of women's suffrage specifically but which advocated an expansion of the electorate), Indian 'women' lobbied again for votes for women.<sup>44</sup> They were lobbying the colonial state, but they were also lobbying Indian men. The Southborough Committee took evidence from two hundred and twenty three people in eight provinces representing diverse interests – Anglo Indians, planters, graduates, landholders, chambers of commerce, Muslims, Congress committees. Three of the participants were women – Mrs Sarla Devi Chaudhuri, a Bengali Theosophist who had graduated with a BA from Calcutta University, and Mrs H. Roshan Lal, an educationist, both from Lahore in the Punjab, and Mrs Sarojini Naidu from Bengal.<sup>45</sup> The Lahori women represented the All India Women's Association but were not expressly authorised to express its views. Sarojini Naidu spoke for the previous deputation of women to Montagu. The following groups sent petitions to the Southborough Committee: forty five branches of the WIA throughout India, eight hundred educated women from Bombay Presidency, the Women's Graduates Union, women's branches of the Home Rule League, the Bharat Stree Mandal (an all India organisation for women founded by Sarla Devi Chaudhuri). In the end, their deputations and petitions came to naught – the Southborough Committee rejected the proposals for women's votes.

The Committee was also concerned about the practicality of women's



electoral participation and was unwilling to rule on whether there should be separate electorates or separate polling booths. The issues of gender segregation merged with those of the low educational level of the majority of Indian women. Finally, the Committee went on to suggest that votes for women could be reconsidered at the next constitutional revision in the light of how the electoral system was working and 'of social conditions as they then exist.'<sup>46</sup>

Nonetheless, there was still hope for a vote for Indian women – ironically by appealing to India's colonial overlords, the British parliament. 'The Government of India Bill,' which incorporated the Montagu Chelmsford proposals for new constitutional arrangements, was to go to a Joint Select Committee of the British Parliament in 1919. Indian male politicians went to Westminster. So did Indian 'women.' Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu gave evidence before the Joint Select Committee. Herabai Tata, educated in India and the UK, and her daughter Mithan Tata, later a barrister, arrived in London (accompanied by the pro-women's suffrage politician Sir Sankaran Nair) too late to give evidence but submitted a statement to the Committee.<sup>47</sup> A number of male Indian politicians also supported votes for women before the Committee. When the Joint Select Committee released its report, it favoured greater rural representation, the nomination of depressed-class representatives and reserved seats for non-Brahmans in Madras and Mahrattas in Bombay. It endorsed separate Muslim electorates, proposed extending the qualification for University seats to graduates of seven years' standing. But it passed cursorily over the question of women's votes.

The Joint Select Committee was of the opinion that women's franchise was a matter for the new provincial legislatures. They recommended that electoral rules could be framed such that if a provincial legislature did decide to allow women to vote, then women could be included on the register. This equivocating recommendation was incorporated in the 'Government of India Act' despite further attempts to change these particular aspects during the passage of the Bill. The Provincial Legislatures rose to the challenge posed by the Joint Select Committee over the next few years. The first elections to the Provincial Councils in 1920 were held without women voters. However, the Madras and Bombay provincial legislatures in April 1921 and July 1921 respectively passed resolutions for women to have the vote. The United Provinces followed suit in 1923. The Central Provinces, Bengal and Punjab resolutions for women to vote were passed in 1925 and 1926. In 1929 a resolution granting women the vote was passed in Bihar and Orissa. This covered almost the entirety of British India. These resolutions did not always pass at the first attempt and the matter was often hotly debated in the Legislative Council.<sup>48</sup>

Like the Southborough Committee, the 1919 Joint Select Committee was also constrained by notions of perceived Indian 'tradition' and the wishes of Indians themselves as constitutionally expressed.<sup>49</sup> In a modern

frame, they reiterated the equation between 'women' and 'tradition,' of the separation of 'tradition' from the colonial state. The British authorities, through their Joint Select Committee, asserted that any integration of Indian 'tradition' with the emergent state is the responsibility of Indian male legislators. These were the men, who through the carefully crafted system of representation set up by the British to balance competing interests, could be said by the British to speak for Indian society at this point in time. The irony was that the indigenous male elite and the British together had constructed Indian 'women' through decades of legal debate over the course of the nineteenth century.

In the nineteenth century English men and Indian men invented a tradition of the Indian to assist them govern India. Under international law principles, the British regarded India as a conquered colony and obliged themselves to administer 'native' law. At the same time they adopted a policy of non-interference in religious matters. It became an important administrative matter to decide what the law was and to delineate what was a matter of religion. In the search for law British scholars aimed to discover the law through translating texts and consulting with Indian lawgivers. The British 'got it wrong' with respect to both the nature of texts, which they regarded as the ultimate authority, and the nature of the advice that they received from the *pandits* which they treated as authority. Theirs was an attempt to mould Indian laws to the notion of codified law and the idea of precedent.<sup>50</sup> Both of these approaches – the treatment of the text itself as ultimately authoritative and the interpretation of the text as the statement of a rule rather than the proposition of an interpretation, undermined customary law. This created a disjunction between law and social practice. In the search for law, British and Indian scholars 'discovered' a golden age of Hindu thought and life in the Vedic period which (real or imagined) was placed in contrast with existing contemporary conditions. By casting ways of living in the house as religious duties amenable to *shastric* law the British constituted the home as religion. Women were identified with 'tradition.' As the state was founded on a policy of non-interference with religion the home then was something apart from the state.<sup>51</sup> But the British also expanded a role for formal law since the home, although apart from the state, was to be governed by a now static *dharmashastra* (text on laws relating to religious and social observances) and by new laws that intervened in this 'traditional' personal law to prohibit certain practices and mandate others. These laws expressed aspirations; they did not reflect established practice. Most of these laws were about women. In the debates on social and legal reform, protagonists described religious and ritual observances that concerned upper-caste and upper-class women. The 'woman question' was limited to these 'women.' It was a conversation between men that contested tradition.

In the aftermath of the 1919 defeats authorised by the Southborough Committee and Joint Select Committee pressing questions remained.

Could women deconstruct 'tradition' from their gender identity themselves? For women, would the emergent state be any different from the colonial state?

### Women suffragists and the burden of tradition

Women who spoke for the vote emphasised that women were people and citizens. They spoke to a liberal democratic notion of citizenship – citizenship-as-legal status encompassing full membership in the political community.<sup>52</sup> Yet, the 'woman as citizen' was not solely a notion of extending a citizenship that should be universal and equal to women. It encompassed recognition of the distinctive role women played in the home. A tension arose between the notion that women were equal citizens to men and that which held woman to be 'distinctive citizens' with different national roles to men. This debate was to later play out in the conversation on reserved seats and wifehood qualifications.<sup>53</sup> However, before this problem of a gendered citizenship identity arose, women had to create a credible discourse of women as responsible and valuable citizens.

The particular value of women's political participation was argued in the memorial Margaret Cousins wrote for the deputation of women led by Sarojini Naidu and presented to Montagu in 1917. It emphasised the importance of nurturing a sense of national responsibility and political understanding among women. It declared their abilities to be well developed and drew on the experience of women in running women's associations. It emphasised the point that women, as one-half of the Indian people, wished to be recognised as *people* and citizens.

We have asked for a portion of your valuable time because *the women of India* have awakened to their *responsibilities* in public life, and have their own independent opinions about the reforms that are necessary for the progress of India. Many organizations have been started by and for women during the past ten years, of which we have representatives here, such as the Indian Women's Association, the Seva Sadan, the Mahila Seva Samaja, the Indian Women's University, the Women's Home Rule League branches etc. We are in touch with the new outlook of Indian women and we make bold at this historic time, to lay before you women's views concerning necessary post-war reforms, as we believe them to be the necessary complement to the views of our men.

The *women of India* understand and support the broad claims of their people for self-government within the Empire, and they press for its bestowal as urgently as do their brothers. They have in large numbers signed the petition organized by Mr Gandhi in favour of the scheme of reform drawn up by the National Congress and the Muslim League. They have also had large ladies meetings, taken part in pro-

cessions and public meetings and in many ways worked towards obtaining the measure of self-government suggested in this scheme and in the non official memorandum of the nineteen members of the Imperial Legislative Council, with the general terms of which they, through us, wish you to know that they are in agreement.

Our interests, as *one-half of the people*, are directly affected by the demand in the united scheme 11.3 that 'the Members of the Council should be elected directly by the people on as broad a franchise as possible,' and in the memorandum (3) that 'the franchise should be broadened and extended directly to the people.' We pray that, when such a franchise is being drawn up, women may be recognized as 'people' and that it may be worded in such terms as will not disqualify our sex, but allow *our women* the same opportunities of representation as *our men*. In agreeing with the demand of the above mentioned memorandum that a full measure of local self-government should be immediately granted, we request that it shall include the representation of *our women*, a policy that has been admittedly successful for the past twenty years in local self-government elsewhere in the British Empire. The precedent for including women in modern Indian political life has been a marked feature of the Indian National Congress, in which, since its inception, women have voted and been delegates and speakers, and which this year finds its climax in the election of a woman as its President. Thus the voice of India approves of its women being considered responsible and acknowledged *citizens*; and we urgently claim that, in the drawing up of all provisions regarding representation, our sex shall not be made a disqualification for the exercise of the franchise or for service in public life [my emphasis].

This memorial speaks for *our women*. It speaks for educated, organised, politically aware and active women. It does not speak for secluded women – many of whom would have been within the property qualification. It does not acknowledge tradition. It says that educated, organised, political women are people and citizens who should have the vote alongside men. There is no trace in their exposition of women as 'tradition.' This memorial does not claim to speak for 'women,' secluded women, or the mass of women. It equates *our women*, educated, political women with *the women of India*. It says the women of India should be acknowledged as responsible citizens. This is squarely within the liberal democratic notion of citizenship that emphasises equal participation. The memorial also links participation as the citizen with participation in nationalist associations, which can be viewed as proto parties or even an incipient form of the nationalist state itself. This is not simply the language of Marshall's<sup>54</sup> passive or private citizenship with 'an emphasis on passive entitlements and the absence of any obligation to participate in public life.'<sup>55</sup> *Our women* are staking their claim for *responsibilities in public life*. In 1917, the

Secretary of State for India and the Viceroy of India did not hear these women.

A year later, the report of the examination of Mrs Sarladevi Chaudhuri and Mrs Roshan Lal before the Southborough Committee indicates that organised women did not have a well rehearsed strategy to deal with the detail of *how* 'our women' should be enfranchised. They emphasised an educational and property qualification – content to leave the bulk of India's women disenfranchised. Their evidence was markedly less concrete than other witnesses before the Committee. They said that women graduates and non-student matriculates should vote. In addition income tax payers, owners of land and those who had earned decorations should vote. They pointed out that in the Punjab there were many widows with the required property qualifications. They also said, referring to indirect voting, that if votes were given to men's associations, they should also be given to women's associations. On the 'practicalities' they suggested that if there were arrangements for women to vote separately at polling stations, then *purdah* ladies could be identified by lady returning officers and could vote. They also suggested that women should be members as well as voters. They suggested that there could be a special seat for the All India Women's Association, which had about 500 members in the Punjab. Mrs Chaudhuri saw all this as 'a beginning'.<sup>156</sup>

It was Sarojini Naidu who linked the question of votes for women to tradition. Sarojini Naidu was an unconventional woman. She was a charismatic public speaker and was steeped in the newly constructed 'tradition' of the Indian 'woman question'.<sup>157</sup> Speaking at the 1917 meeting of the Indian National Congress she declared:

I am only a woman. I should like to say to you all, when your hour strikes, when you need torch bearers in the darkness to lead you, when you want standard bearers to uphold your banner and when you die for want of faith, the womanhood of India will be with you as the holder of your banner, and the sustainers of your strength. And if you die, remember, the spirit of Padmini of Chittor is enshrined in the womanhood of India.<sup>158</sup>

The *sati* of Chittor was invoked as a public sacrifice for self-government and as a threat – if men fail in seeking self-government, women will immolate themselves. The nineteenth century 'woman question' had little to do with real women and more to do with the contest between elite men and the British. Sarojini Naidu's comments are within this discourse. Yet here, at the same time she says that women can act through the promise of declaring for the cause and being faithful to the cause. Still, 'the womanhood of India' seems no more about the material life of a woman than the nineteenth century 'woman question.'

Sarojini Naidu also spoke at the Bombay Provincial Conference at

Bijapur in September 1918. From its inception, the demand of votes for women was connected with female education and self-government within the Empire. Now, Sarojini Naidu linked nationalism to women's franchise. She declared to the predominantly male audience: 'The question is whether in the reconstruction of the national life it will be possible for you to have a rich national life unless and until it is shared and supported by women who are the soul of citizenship.'<sup>59</sup>

Here, the new citizenship in the emergent national state is personified; it has a soul and that soul is women.

In a different speech given around the same time at the Special Congress in Bombay with the Muslim League that passed the resolutions noted above supporting votes for women, Sarojini Naidu set out the meaning of female franchise:

We ask for franchise, we ask for the vote, not that we might interfere with you in your official functions, your civic duties, your public place and power, but rather that we might lay the foundation of national character in the souls of children that we hold upon our laps and instil them with ideas of nationality. We want the franchise for them that we might glorify the dirt, the degradation of civic life, that we might be able by our own implacable ideas of moral purity to cleanse our public life. We want the franchise to yield that power that says that our sons shall not be denationalised. We want the franchise to say that our education shall not be the imitation of unsuitable and alien things but rather that our nationality shall be enlightening for our national traditions and that our national characteristics shall be the outcome of our own needs and capacities.<sup>60</sup>

Citizenship of women was also emphasised in the 1917 deputation to Montagu. In 1918 after the British left women's franchise to Indian men, Sarojini Naidu, addressing an overwhelmingly male Indian audience, placed the civic duties of men in the foreground. In contrast, the women who petitioned Montagu wanted the vote so that women would be recognised as *people* and *citizens*. Sarojini Naidu claims to speak for women and that women want the vote for the good of the nation. Here *we*, women, are *morally pure*. This engages the notion that 'women' have been successfully kept apart from the colonial state; it also engages the notion that *civic life* is impure – either internalising British notions regarding the character of degraded Indian society, or because *civic life* is *denationalised*. She also invokes ritual purity and impurity associated with caste. Sarojini Naidu asserts that *we might be able – to cleanse public life*. This invokes the ritual cleansing by Brahmans who have been defiled by contact with impure lower castes or untouchables. It also refers to contamination or defilement by the British. She is constructing a role for *pure* women to make a *pure* emergent state. The purpose of this is for *our sons* and *our education*. This

emphasises the role of the mother, yet it is linked with education for women themselves. Here, Sarojini Naidu is claiming both political and social rights for women as citizens. At the Joint Select Committee on the Government of India Bill, Sarojini Naidu said:

I am here today to plead this cause, not to ask for it as a concession or favour, but because it is our right by historic tradition. It symbolizes for us the hope of a future which will not depend on office or power. We Indian women do not care for office; we do not care for power as power; we are not ambitious in that sense. Always, I think, the home will remain the unit of central government in India, and it will never require any change. But for that central government to be effective, for that central government to carry authority, and for that central government to be able to shape and control the ideals and destinies of India we feel that this authoritative sanction of the Indian women's voice should be granted, and that can only be given if *you* realize that it means unity for India, it means for India prestige in the eyes of other nations whose taunt to us is that our women have no place in the scheme of things. It is by the right of a past inheritance, it is by the hope of future progress, that I make this appeal to you.<sup>61</sup>

Sarojini Naidu argued that women have a right to be part of the emergent state because it is *our right by historic tradition*.<sup>62</sup>

We have seen that this is a constructed tradition, which privileged the *shastras* (texts on social and religious observances) as law at the expense of custom. In the colonial discourse women are constructed as powerless, and in the 'golden age' discourse women are constructed as powerful. Sarojini Naidu says women do not want *power as power* yet she refers to *past inheritance* which invokes the 'golden age' – a term she used in previous speeches.<sup>63</sup> She wanted to reincorporate the domestic with the state. She made the claim that the *central unit of government* is the *home* and for the home to be *effective*, for *women's voices* to be heard, they must have the vote. There is no discussion here as to whether the virtues of the home and motherhood are appropriate for democratic citizenship.<sup>64</sup> They are the central conception in Sarojini Naidu's vision of citizenship for women. Sarojini Naidu is offering the virtuous exercise of private power to the state.

Hearing *women's voices* and giving women the vote means *unity for India*. Sarojini Naidu is saying that women are women, not Hindu women not Muslim women, and that the country should not be divided on communal lines. This is a critical statement at a time when nationalist politics was grappling with the issue of reconciling Muslim and Hindu differences and had reached an uneasy *détente*. Sarojini Naidu says here that women are an integrative force in the Indian polity.

Hearing *women's voices* and the vote means *prestige* for India. One of the

justifications for colonial rule was the low status of women. If women have the vote and are heard, that justification no longer exists. Sarojini Naidu's concept of citizenship for women involved social, political and civic rights in a way that connected the domestic with the emerging democratic state, overcame communal differences and led to freedom. If women participate in political life by voting this refutes the argument that Indian society is not worthy and increases the prestige of the country. If women were granted the vote, India could be viewed as modern and forward-looking rather than backward. Sarojini Naidu posited virtue in a citizenship that should lead to national regeneration.

Examined on the 'practicalities' of votes for women, Sarojini Naidu said that as *pardah* was observed only in certain regions and among certain sections of women, why should it be thrown in the faces of all women? She said that she had never known *pardah* to come in the way of anything women wanted to do from sports to exams. She conceded that it might not be possible to set up *pardah* polling booths from the outset. Her view was to let local authorities deal with the matter when there was sufficient demand from *pardahnashins* (women behind the curtain in seclusion).<sup>65</sup> Seclusion, for Sarojini Naidu was not a bar to virtuous, responsible citizenship exercised within and from the home; rights could still be exercised irrespective of *pardah*.

## **Conclusions**

One of the projects of Indian nationalists was to create the modern 'Indian' – hence the importance given to all India forums by both male and female nationalists. 'Women' is a category of persons that is deaf to the meaning of any particular communal group. Further, 'women' are perceived as signifiers of tradition. The nationalists came to support votes for 'women' because this was a demand for votes for persons whose identity transcended regional and communal boundaries. In the categories in which electoral returns were analysed 'women' were not non-Muhammadian, Muhammadian, Christian, urban or rural even though individual female voters may be categorised this way. These Indian women did not question why 'women' were an issue in the contest between the indigenous male elite and the imperial British. They drew on the tradition that had constructed 'women' in this way and made this narrative their own. 'Women' did not ask whether their identification with tradition obscured deep divisions within Indian society. Within this tradition real women were barely heard as living material persons. Casting the demand for the vote in this way continued 'women' as a site for male contest. The vote as a symbol of liberal democracy remained linked to an illiberal tradition. Yet what appears to be a simple appeal to a constructed tradition of the glories of the past in order to negotiate some current rights is actually a radical conceptualisation of what might be entailed in citizenship for



women. To link the home and motherhood with the emergent national state represented women as citizens with equal rights who would exercise virtuous responsibilities. This did recognise the material lives of some women. But it failed to ask which home, whose home? It did nothing for any female chattel slaves of the 1920s. The suffrage movement remained based on a 'tradition' that was caste and class based and remained the preserve of educated, upper-class women.

## Notes

- 1 Lata Mani argued that the legal and religious debates on *sati* (the immolation of widows on the funeral pyre) and the subsequent debates on women into the nineteenth century were not really about women's status but rather the construction and contestation of 'tradition.' L. Mani *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- 2 See G. Forbes, 'Votes for women,' in V. Mazumdar (ed.), *Symbols of Power*, Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1979; V. Agnew, *Elite Women in Indian Politics*, Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1979, Chapter VI; G. Pearson, 'Reserved seats – women and the vote in Bombay,' *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 20, 1, 1983, 47–65; J. Krishnamurthy (ed.), *Women in Colonial India*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989; B. Southard, 'Colonial politics and women's rights: woman suffrage campaigns in Bengal, British India in the 1920s,' *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 27, 2, 1993, 397–439; M. John, 'Alternate Modernities? Reservations and Women's Movement in 20th Century India,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2000, October 28, WS 22–29.
- 3 He gave evidence with Pandit Mohan Malaviya. The Reforms Committee Franchise, *Evidence Taken Before The Reforms Committee (Franchise) 1919*, India Office Library J. and P. 'R,' vol. 10 United Provinces, 1918, p. 112. Presidential address of Pandit Motilal Nehru, 26 December 1919, The Indian National Congress 34th Session, Amritsar, 1919.
- 4 Bombay Legislative Council, 27 July 1921, p. 252.
- 5 Partha Chatterjee argues that the woman question was resolved by the end of the nineteenth century in nationalist discourse. P. Chatterjee, 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question,' in K. Sangari and S. Vaid (eds), *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, Delhi: Kali for Women, 1990, pp. 233–53.
- 6 See N.F. Anderson, 'Bridging cross cultural feminisms: Annie Besant and women's rights in England and India, 1874–1933,' *Women's History Review*, vol. 3, 4, 1994, 563.
- 7 See T.A. Baig, *Sarojini Naidu*, Government of India, Ministry of Information, 1974.
- 8 'Address presented by the All India Women's Deputation to Lord Chelmsford and The Right Honourable E.S. Montagu, 1 December 1917,' in M. Reddi, *One Who Knows, Mrs Margaret Cousins And Her Work in India*, Madras: Women's Indian Association, 1956. This is a compilation of Mrs Cousins' private papers.
- 9 Both B.G. Tilak and G.K. Gokhale were members of the Bombay Council in the 1890s.
- 10 J. Masselos, *Towards Nationalism*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1974.
- 11 Amendment to The Bombay Municipal Act 'Bar Against Women,' *Bombay Chronicle*, 28 September 1900 cited in G. Forbes, op. cit.
- 12 Legislative Dept July 1920, 19–21. *Interpellation* by the Hon V.J. Patel re the

- votes for women in the Bombay Presidency Legislative council, 25 February 1920, National Archives of India.
- 13 Margaret Cousins to Annie Besant, 4 June 1919, Adyar Archives.
- 14 *Bombay Chronicle*, 28 September 1920, p. 8.
- 15 *Bombay Chronicle*, 16 January 1923, p. 4; 24 January 1923, p. 5; 7 February 1923, p. 5; 8 March 1923, p. 5; 11 April 1923, p. 5; 16 April 1923, p. 7.
- 16 Margaret Cousins to Annie Besant, op. cit.
- 17 'Report of the Franchise Committee on Indian Constitutional Reforms (Southborough Committee) 1918, 1919.'
- 18 *New Dispensation*, 21 May 1882; M. Borthwick, *The Changing Role of Women in Bengal 1849–1905*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 338.
- 19 Evidence of Mrs Roshan Lal, Evidence before Franchise Committee of Southborough Committee.
- 20 Evidence of J.B. Deshmukh (hereditary family), Mr Madhaorao Shrihari Aney, Evidence before Franchise Committee of Southborough Committee, 11–13 December 1918.
- 21 See, for example, D. Rothermund, 'Emancipation or re-integration: The politics of Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Herbert Hope Risley,' in D. Low (ed.), *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*, The ANU Press, 1968.
- 22 *Indian Ladies Magazine*, vol. 7, 11, 1908, 368.
- 23 The Imperial Legislative Council had 68 members, 27 were elected. The total number of electors was 4,818 of whom 2,406 were landowners and 1,901 were Muslims. P. Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972, p. 167.
- 24 Government of India Home Political F, December 1909, 9–11. National Archives of India.
- 25 *Parliamentary Debates*, Great Britain, House of Commons, Fifth Series, vol. XCV11, col. 1695–6 cited in J. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968, p. 98.
- 26 R. Kumar, *Western India in the Nineteenth Century*, Canberra: The ANU Press, 1968, p. 316.
- 27 J. Broomfield, 'The forgotten majority: The Bengal Muslims and September 1918,' in D. Low (ed.), *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*, Canberra: The ANU Press, 1968, p. 206fn. This was in the context of the Lucknow Pact of 1916 in which the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League agreed on separate electorates and over representation in minority provinces the quid pro quo being under representation in majority provinces such as Bengal.
- 28 E. Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South Asia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, p. 80fn.
- 29 G.A. Thomas, *Secy to Govt of Bombay to Secy to the Govt of India Dept of Education*, 16 January 1917, Maharashtra State Archives, E D 80 Part 11 1920.
- 30 India Office Library, IOL L/P&J/6/1912, no. 4522; 'Manuscript giving account of work concerning female bonded labour in Fiji,' with Papers of the Bhagini Samaj, Bombay.
- 31 See Cousins' books *The Awakening of Asian Womanhood*, Madras: Ganesh, 1922 and *Indian Womanhood Today*, Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1941.
- 32 Women's India Association [hereafter WIA], *Quinquennial Report 1917–22*, p. 4.
- 33 Other women were Graduates including Ramabai Nilkanth and Jaishree Rajjee. Annie Besant papers, Adyar. Folder on the Indian Women's University includes minutes of the first meeting of the Senate, 10 June 1916.
- 34 The request for a deputation was sent in a letter signed by Margaret Cousins and four Indian women, one of who, Saralabai Naik, had an MA. The other

three had BAs. Letter from Saraladevi Chaudhari, Margaret Cousins, Saralabai Naik Ramanbai Nilkanth and Mrs Srirangamma to Montague, 31 October 1917 in Reddi, op. cit.

35 Ibid.

36 See 'Demand for the grant of the Vote,' in Reddi, op. cit., p. 3.

37 See H. Sen, 'Our own times,' in T.A. Baig (ed.), *Women of India*, Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1958, p. 35.

38 India Office Library, Constitutional Reforms Addresses presented in India to His Excellency the Viceroy and Honourable the Secretary of State for India 1918, XVIII, no. 74, The All India Women's Deputation.

39 Sarojini Naidu to Omar Sobhani, 27 August 1919, Home Political B, September 1919, nos 454-7, *Weekly Report of Director, Central Intelligence*, 29 September 1919, p. 29. National Archives of India.

40 Margaret Cousins to Annie Besant, 4 June 1919, Adyar Archives appended a printed pamphlet from Madras. Also appended to Appendix CC of Joint Select Committee, 1919 vol. III (i.e. the joint statement of Herabai Tata and Mithan Tata. This was a rather barbed explanation as the pamphlet noted that 'A woman was president of the Congress - Mrs Annie Besant.')

41 Sarojini Naidu speech at the eighteenth session of the Bombay Provincial Conference in S. Naidu, *Speeches and Writings*, Madras: Natesan, 1925, p. 195.

42 'Resolution vii, Women possessing the same qualifications as are laid down for men in any part of the scheme shall not be disqualified on account of sex. Resolution viii, that so far as the question of determining the Franchise and the constituencies and the composition of the Legislative Assemblies is concerned, this Congress is of the opinion that, instead of being left to be dealt with by Committees, it should be decided by the House of Commons and be incorporated in the statute to be framed for the constitution of the Indian Government.' Sarojini Naidu moved this resolution at the Special National Congress held with the Muslim League at Bombay in September 1918. The resolution passed with a three quarters majority. Margaret Cousins to Annie Besant, op. cit.; Naidu, op. cit., p. 198.

43 WIA, op. cit.; Margaret Cousins to Annie Besant, op. cit.

44 WIA, op. cit., p. 8; Margaret Cousins to Annie Besant, op. cit.

45 'Report of the Franchise Committee on Indian Constitutional Reforms (Southborough Committee) 1918, 1919,' Appendix XIII, pp. 95-100.

46 Ibid.

47 He was the sole Government of India member who had supported Mr Hogg's dissent on the Southborough Committee for women's votes. Letter from Government of India to Montagu Simla, 23 April 1919, no. 4, Home Dept in India Office Library East India (Constitutional Reforms: Lord Southborough's Committees). Views of the Government of India upon the Reports of Lord Southborough's Committees, p. 3.

48 For a detailed analysis of Bengal see B. Southard, op. cit.; see also Legislative Dept Assembly, *Council Proceedings*, June 1922, nos 3-4.

49 'Report from the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and House of Commons appointed to consider the Government of India Bill (1919),' India Office Library, Teen Murti Library, p. 7.

50 On the non static nature of the pre British law tradition see R. Dhavan, 'Introduction - The jurisprudence and sociology of modern Indian law,' in M. Galanter (ed.), *Law and Society in Modern India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. xiii-c.

51 On the severance of Hindu social and ritual relations from the colonial state see R. O'Hanlon, 'Issues of widowhood in colonial western India,' in D. Haynes

- and G. Prakash (eds), *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992, p. 77.
- 52 On citizenship as treating each person as a full and equal member of society with civil, political and social rights see, T.H. Marshall, 'Citizenship and social class,' in *Class Citizenship and Social Development*, New York: Anchor Books, 1965; W. Kymlicka and W. Norman, 'Return of the citizen: A survey of recent work on citizenship theory,' *Ethics*, vol. 104, 2, 1994, 353.
- 53 See Pearson, op. cit.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Kymlicka and Norman, op. cit., p. 354.
- 56 The Reforms Committee Franchise. Evidence taken before the Reforms Committee (Franchise) 1919, India Office Library in J.&P. 'R,' vol. 10, see Punjab, December 1918.
- 57 Sarojin Naidu used this phrase in a speech to the 1906 Calcutta Indian Social Conference on the Education of Women; see T.A. Baig, *Sarojini Naidu*, Government of India, Ministry of Information, 1974, p. 35.
- 58 Ibid., p. 45. This is a reference to a famous sati.
- 59 Naidu, op. cit., p. 196.
- 60 Ibid., p. 200.
- 61 'Report from the Joint Select Committee,' op. cit., vol. II, p. 132.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Account of the Bombay Special Congress in *Bombay Chronicle*, 29 September 1930, p. 9.
- 64 See M. Dietz, 'Context is all: Feminism and theories of citizenship,' *Daedalus*, vol. 116, 4, 1987, 1–24; C. Pateman, 'Equality, difference subordination: The politics of motherhood and women's citizenship,' in G. Bock and S. James (eds), *Beyond Equality and Difference: Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity*, New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 17–31. On the virtues of citizenship see Kymlick and Norman, op. cit., p. 359fn.
- 65 'Report from the Joint Select Committee,' op. cit., vol. II, p. 132.

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## 10 Settler anxieties, indigenous peoples and women's suffrage in the colonies of Australia, New Zealand and Hawai'i, 1888 to 1902

*Patricia Grimshaw*

In the year 1896 an American woman named Jessie Ackermann published in Chicago a book entitled *The World Through a Woman's Eyes*.<sup>1</sup> It was a traveller's tale of unusual interest. This lady traveller had undertaken a journey of almost epic proportions (especially given her much mentioned propensity to seasickness). Since she sailed out of San Francisco in the autumn of 1888, she claimed to have covered 150,000 miles in all. Following the track of the eighteenth-century English explorer James Cook, Ackermann visited Hawai'i, New Zealand and Australia. She had set foot on every continent of the world – exotic places like China, Japan, Thailand, Java, Burma, India and South Africa among them. She claimed unusually close contact with local people.

I was a guest in nearly two thousand homes; all kinds of homes, rich and poor, high and low – from the palace, government house and castle to the thatched cot of the sturdy farmer, the canvas or tin tent of the miner, and the bark hut of the lumber camp.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, her tale was unusual because of her strong declared interest in the position of women across the globe. Alas, she observed, the sentiment that lay behind the poet's tribute, that woman was 'the sex whose presence civilizes,' was acknowledged for a mere quarter of the world's women. She pointed out that only a short time previously, some of her own countrywomen had had to be released from slavery and 'elevated to the dignity of womanhood.' It could be done. Now was the time for American women to look outward, beyond their own shores, to take American women's 'higher civilization' to influence women's lives everywhere.<sup>3</sup>

While she does not acknowledge it in her book, which doubtless she hoped would be bought for enjoyment by the widest possible readership, Jessie Ackermann's journey had indeed been centrally concerned with the ambition to spread the 'higher civilization' to foreign women. She visited so many lands not simply from a spirit of adventure or curiosity but as a paid organizer, or, as her employers called it, a 'round-the-world missionary' of a large and prominent organization, the World's Woman's Chris-

tian Temperance Union (WCTU). Frances Willard, the American temperance leader, had shepherded the foundation of the World's WCTU in 1883 when she forged a strategic alliance with Lady Henry Somerset, president of the British Women's Temperance Association, to further their reform interests internationally. The American reformers thereby gained a higher profile and greater international significance, in addition to privileged access for their evangelists, not only where American commercial or mission activity had taken root but also in the countless sites of Britain's widespread empire.<sup>4</sup>

The World's WCTU missionaries, first Mary Leavitt, who began her work in 1884, and next Ackermann, carried a novel message that combined temperance and other moral reform concerns with the women's rights agenda of the United States women's movement, including a claim for political rights for their sex. As recent studies have shown, Frances Willard had skilfully persuaded women, whose politicization initially arose from anger at excessive male drinking and its harmful impact on women and children, that solutions for a nation's ills would be found in promoting women's full entry to public life. Voting in elections and standing for political office were not only rights but also responsibilities that women, representing the spirit of motherhood, should gladly assume.<sup>5</sup> Few nations, Leavitt and Ackermann were to discover, were particularly interested in enfranchising their male population, not to mention the female half.

Ackermann, like Mary Leavitt before her, found little to raise immediate hopes for female emancipation in her brief sight of society and culture in the eastern lands she visited. There might be justification for hope for Japanese women given that the government had awakened to the fact that 'the development of a country depends largely on the development and education of its women.'<sup>6</sup> But the Chinese appeared not in the least anxious 'to help make the world's history, to see the beginning of new movements, the birth of new ideas.'<sup>7</sup> It was among British and American expatriate communities that the World's WCTU had its greatest immediate impact, since these were the places where democracy, as Americans described it, was a realistic possibility.<sup>8</sup>

There were women among Protestants of British birth or descent in the six colonies of Australia and in the colony of New Zealand, and among similar Christians of American birth or descent resident in Hawai'i who were receptive to ideas of political rights. Leavitt and Ackermann visited all these communities, which since first white intrusion had gone separate ways politically. Hawai'i in 1888 sustained a fragile indigenous Hawaiian kingdom, with an increasingly assertive American planter and business community. By contrast, Britain had incorporated New Zealand and the six Australian colonies into its empire, although settlers had managed to claim a good deal of authority themselves. In all three places, the two envoys found Christian women conversant with the more radical



component of the WCTU's agenda, its bid to mobilize women to political action on the basis of 'moral motherhood.'<sup>9</sup> Local leaders swiftly took up this cause. In New Zealand and the Australian colonies, they were instrumental in bringing the issue to the fore of public debate in the last decade of the nineteenth and first decade of the twentieth century. The successful passage of women's suffrage in New Zealand in 1893 and in the newly federated Commonwealth of Australia in 1902, distinctly in advance of their northern land of origin, brought temporary fame. By contrast, WCTU women of the American community in Hawai'i unsuccessfully raised the question of the women's vote early in the 1890s. Unlike those in many western states and territories of the United States, women in the Hawaiian islands had to wait for their political emancipation, like so many other American women on the mainland, until the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1920.<sup>10</sup>

The events that led to the passage of the women's vote in Australia and New Zealand have been the subject of several studies that have explored in detail the campaign for the vote, its protagonists and its passage through colonial legislatures.<sup>11</sup> In Hawai'i the failure of the WCTU reformers and other suffragists to achieve the vote at an earlier stage has



*Figure 10.1* Miss Ackermann in Oriental Costume. From Jessie Ackermann, *The World Through Women's Eyes* (Chicago: n.p., 1896, opposite p. 147).

gone largely unremarked.<sup>12</sup> A new understanding of the success of the suffrage in Australia and New Zealand and its failure in Hawai'i can come from bringing these sites into a comparative framework of racial fears and contested colonialism.<sup>13</sup> Doing so indicates the extent to which settler anxieties about indigenous peoples' potential access to political rights influenced the differing political outcomes for women's suffrage campaigns. This chapter commences with an exploration of the intervention of the WCTU-led suffrage campaigns in the civil status of settler and indigenous men and women in colonial New Zealand and Australia; it then evaluates in this context the stance of WCTU activists on race, and finally it considers the contrasting situation in Hawai'i (as kingdom, republic and American Territory) in the late 1880s and 1890s.

### **Indigenous and settler suffrage in New Zealand and Australia**

By the later decades of the nineteenth century, the six colonies of Australia and the colony of New Zealand were notable for their many effective exponents of British liberalism. Indeed the success of colonial liberalism in itself explains much about colonial receptivity to new ideas about women's social position. Many male politicians could quote John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* and in the absence of an entrenched conservative ruling class, the political culture was sympathetic to radical democratic proposals. As was the case in the United States adult white male suffrage was enacted early in most colonies. The British Colonial Office conceded responsible government to their fledgling British colonies in the 1850s, passing most of the internal affairs to settler legislatures. The British established political rights for certain adult men, enshrining property qualifications for elections and standing for office. Quite quickly, however, the new settler governments moved to broaden the electorate. They initially maintained property qualifications for the upper house, the house of review, but enacted adult male suffrage for the lower, popular house in which substantial power was invested.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the large farming and rural sector in Australian and New Zealand colonies, small industries flourished, stimulating urban growth in port and regional centres. The urban and rural industries promoted in turn the growth of a sturdy union movement that by the late 1800s had spawned labour representatives in parliaments and social democratic parties in the making.<sup>15</sup> Labour men had no political interests in blocking the women's vote, given universal male suffrage, provided no property qualification was added to the acts. Few suffrage supporters in or out of the legislatures argued for such restrictions for long. Some of the factors, therefore, that retarded the progress of suffrage campaigns elsewhere – traditional upper-class conservatism, working-class opposition to suffrage that favoured the middle class – did not apply in these colonies.<sup>16</sup> The

political climate generated by liberalism and nascent labour movements sustained a relative white male tolerance towards civil rights for white women. In such large cities as Sydney, Melbourne and Christchurch, small numbers of women associated together to press for the vote. Some were middle-class women supported by the income of spouses, and some had private means. Working women were quick to be aware of the suffrage question, and some found routes to register their interest.<sup>17</sup>

Mary Leavitt and Jessie Ackermann found the colonies also were fertile soil for the WCTU, as a women's organization that promoted temperance along with women's rights. If these suffragists who were temperance activists had a key anxiety, it was violent white men, irresponsible husbands and abusive fathers. Male drinking to excess, binge drinking, deaths from drunkenness, male-on-male violence and domestic violence were rife on these male-dominated frontiers of white settlement. The message of the World's WCTU which Leavitt brought in the mid-1880s and Ackermann reinforced in the late 1880s and 1890s, made sense to progressive evangelical women already active in parochial reform. The WCTU in New Zealand, which Leavitt inaugurated in 1885, when she formed ten branches between February and August, had within two years appointed a Franchise Superintendent, Kate Wilson Sheppard, who proved astute in adapting the various methods of political lobbying to pursue the suffrage cause. The women's vote came close to passing in successive years from 1890, 1891 and 1892, and finally won a majority in both houses of the legislature in September 1893. All adult women received the vote and exercised it in large numbers in the general election in November of that year.<sup>18</sup>

The situation in the six Australian colonies was similar in the rapidity with which women's suffrage moved from the first serious mention in public debate to political reality. In the two colonies where women's suffrage was enacted before the end of the century, South Australia and Western Australia, the WCTU was also the major player in the suffrage campaign.<sup>19</sup> South Australia enfranchised women in 1894, and Western Australia did so in 1899. It was the South Australian decision that proved crucial in the decision to give women in the new Commonwealth of Australia the vote eight years later, in 1902.

When senior politicians from the six colonies met during the mid-1890s to draft the federal Constitution, they intended to make the provisions for voting rights for the new Commonwealth Parliament the same as currently held good in each colony. Some objected, however, that, since women could vote in South Australia, this one new state would have an unfair advantage. The writers of the Constitution compromised by protecting South Australian women's voting rights, and subsequently Western Australian women's rights, but anticipated swift legislation in the new Parliament to enfranchise women in all other states.<sup>20</sup> Women in the other four states – New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania – were sim-

ilarly enfranchised federally, as promised, under the Commonwealth Electoral Act in 1902. The voting rights in those states followed on from the federal legislation: 1902 in New South Wales, 1903 in Tasmania, 1905 in Queensland and 1908 in Victoria.<sup>21</sup>

### **Racial anxiety and responses to women's political demands**

One reason for the absence of male opposition to women's suffrage was so pervasive as to go almost unnoticed, then and since. A very real anxiety about the future of their new nations consumed leading settler politicians as the century drew to a close – an anxiety that intertwined with responses to women's political rights. How were the white citizens of New Zealand and Australia to keep their countries white? White colonial politicians were not dealing solely with the rights of indigenous peoples. They faced a dual anxiety, given their fear that Asian peoples – particularly Chinese – might immigrate and outnumber the British population, as the latter had once overwhelmed the Aborigines.

As the Australian colonies moved towards federation, a leader in the federation cause, Alfred Deakin, declared: 'The question of white Australia touches all colonists' instinct for self-preservation.' No power dissolved divisions among colonists so powerfully, he said, than 'the desire that we should be one people, and remain one people, without the admixture of other races.'<sup>22</sup> In a situation where white male politicians made such racial distinctions, white women could appear to them very much part of the privileged and beleaguered elite white circle, dissolving divisions based on gender. As one Member of Parliament said when debating women's suffrage in Western Australia:

It is admitted on all sides that, while men are only the progenitors of our race, the women are its saviours; and that on the future of the Anglo-Saxon race to which we are all proud to belong, and on the future of the civilised races of the world, women are exercising a higher influence and playing a more important part and will continue to do so, than men can aspire to do. On these lines I claim the right of woman to have a vote.<sup>23</sup>

Added, then, to a liberal political climate and a strong democratic labour movement pledged to social justice was a racism that drove a desire to keep the colonies white. White women were part of the 'Anglo-Saxon race' that the colonies celebrated as they congratulated themselves on pioneering a new land and creating prosperous and progressive societies. These men had created a narrative of success in which white women, when they paused to think about it, were a valued part. White women had endured the hazards of new frontiers, they reminded each other, and they were the honoured mothers of future white citizens. Such racialized

thinking goes some way towards explaining the absence of effective opposition to women's suffrage once women activists publicly promoted the cause.

There was, however, a major difference in the ways these anxieties were represented in the provisions for the women's vote in New Zealand and the Commonwealth of Australia. In New Zealand the electoral act of 1893 brought in universal adult female suffrage for Maori and white settler women alike. Australia, by contrast, brought in female suffrage for white women only. The Commonwealth Electoral Act of 1902 excluded Aborigines, even if, in the letter of the law, this was not for some states immediately apparent. A clause read: 'No Aboriginal native of Australia, Asia, Africa or the Islands of the Pacific, except New Zealand, shall be entitled to have his name placed on the electoral roll.'<sup>24</sup> Section 41 of the Constitution, which enshrined federal voting rights for those who voted in the states, should have protected the political rights of Aboriginal men in the south-eastern states, but interpreters of the constitution and bureaucratic implementation removed them. In New Zealand settler fears of men of colour had led to the incorporation of Maori men into the mainstream political system; hence Maori women could readily be incorporated as well when the women's vote was on the agenda. Settler fears of men of colour in Australia, however, led to their exclusion from mainstream politics at the very time that women's suffrage was on the national agenda. Aboriginal women inevitably suffered the same fate. We need to consider in some detail the working through of racial politics in each country to understand how the different position of indigenous women and men, compared with white women, occurred.

In New Zealand the difference may be traced to two historical factors: Maori adoption of Christianity and conversely Maori capacity for military defence against settler occupation. The British Crown first assumed political control of the islands of New Zealand in 1840 under the Treaty of Waitangi, when Maori chiefs agreed to concede a degree of sovereignty to the British in the face of the continuing uncontrolled arrival of white people. A people who lived principally by horticulture and fishing, Maori society was highly stratified and dominated by a strong chiefly elite. Previously warlike and feuding, the chiefs with their peoples had converted to Christianity after 1814 when missionaries first established their mission stations. Initially, Maori groups were prepared to concede land for sale to settlers. As the governor of the colony, Gore Browne told settler politicians in 1854, their prudent goal had to be 'to preserve and to advance the scale of civilization of the native inhabitants of these Islands,' while remaining 'the pioneers for its colonization by the Anglo Saxon race.' Keeping these dual goals in harmony proved very difficult.<sup>25</sup>

When by the early 1860s many Maori chiefs, alarmed at the pressure of the growing number of white arrivals, became reluctant to alienate additional land, hostilities broke into open warfare, and British troops arrived

in considerable numbers to defend their expatriates' interests. When the worst of the fighting was over, the British governor in New Zealand and the Colonial Office back in London faced the question of how the defeated Maori should be treated in the representative political system they had established in the colony. Since Maori held most land in common, seldom individually, few Maori men had qualified to vote or stand for office under the first constitution, which contained a property qualification. As settlers began to press for white adult male suffrage, the governor feared that, if Maori men were excluded, ensuing bitterness might lead to further hostilities. As a leading white politician said in agreement, the New Zealand legislature needed 'to use the means at its disposal for allaying any of the angry feeling or excitement that might still remain.'<sup>26</sup> But the anxieties of settlers did not end there. Despite the fact that Maori, prone to imported European diseases, were rapidly decreasing as the white population grew, Maori were still numerous enough in some electorates to have a substantial influence on the outcome of an election, harming settler candidates and ultimately the supremacy of white interests in the legislature. The result was a compromise. Under the Maori Representation Act of 1867, Maori were allocated four special seats, three in the North Island and one for the whole of the South Island, on an adult male suffrage basis. Only Maori would be eligible for these seats, though Maori could stand in other electorates as well. Viewed from one perspective, it looked a liberal provision: Maori men could vote, and at least four Maori would be members of every Parliament. Proposed as an interim measure, the separate electorates in fact stayed in place into the next century.<sup>27</sup>

When the Parliaments of 1890 to 1893, therefore, considered the women's vote there was little or no question of excluding Maori women. The electoral settlement had occurred 25 years earlier. When the question was put to the House of Representatives 'the voices of the friends of the Maori ladies rose in such a roar' that the matter was settled on voice vote.<sup>28</sup> Maori women's political rights could be accommodated by their allocation to the same four Maori electorates. Universal women's enfranchisement in 1893 did not unsettle the system previously designed to protect settler from potential renewed Maori military aggression and Maori political power. White women did not need to be kept out of the system so that Maori women could be kept out also.

The settlement that white legislators reached in relation to white women's and Aboriginal peoples' political rights at the time of the creation of the Commonwealth of Australia was more complex. The history of each colony was different, as were their interests or reservations about joining the federation. Those colonial politicians who promoted federation needed to counter core objections coming from the separate colonies. Aborigines were most numerous in the north and west. When politicians from Western Australia and Queensland voiced negative

opinions of Aborigines' capacity to contribute to white political processes, and added fears concerning the potential impact of the Aboriginal vote should they exercise it, their peers in southeastern Australia listened sympathetically, ready to compromise. Brazenly, given an ostensible commitment to democracy, Australian politicians were prepared to let white women in while keeping Aboriginal men and women outside the political system. They had all treated indigenous Australians shamefully. The wish to negate them as a political presence as they had marginalized them socially shaped the electoral provisions.

The British occupation of the Australian continent – or at least those parts of it with sufficient rainfall for white pastoralism – was rapid, after the initial decades of convict settlement. As men with their flocks of sheep and herds of cattle fanned out across the interior, they encountered small bands of hunter-gatherer Aborigines who moved across their tribal territories to pursue game and harvest seasonal plants and fruits. When Aborigines resisted white incursions, retribution by white men on horseback with guns was swift and terrible. As in New Zealand, European diseases took a further toll on a beleaguered people. With no treaties to offer even the semblance of protection, surviving Aborigines were accorded no land to which they had title, and many were forcibly resettled on mission stations and reserves where lives of poverty, minimal education and draconian state surveillance awaited them.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, Aboriginal men were not debarred from political rights in the first constitutions of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania under which the British government handed over responsible government to settlers. Nor, when those colonies moved to manhood suffrage, did they insert such a bar. Most Aborigines were, of course, excluded as 'paupers' since the state funded the missions on which so many lived. Western Australia and Queensland governments, where the frontier was not closed until the end of the century, retained a property qualification for Aboriginal men. Given that Aborigines had lost their lands, few if any would qualify.<sup>30</sup>

When in the 1890s representatives of the colonies met to write a Constitution for a new Commonwealth of Australia, they wanted a uniform franchise for federal elections but faced two obstacles. One was the differences across the colonies in existing political rights for Aboriginal men. The other was the fact that one colony, South Australia, had granted political rights to women. The solution was spelled out in the Constitution adopted in 1901, which saw the launching of the new nation, and in the Commonwealth Franchise Act, which the new federal legislature passed the following year. In effect, different outcomes were chosen for Aborigines and for white women. Aboriginal men and women, were in effect excluded from political rights, along with other people of colour whose immigration was severely restricted. All adult white women, conversely, received full political rights.<sup>31</sup> Would it not, asked a Western Australian

Senator, be 'absolutely repugnant' to most people of the Commonwealth that an Aboriginal woman, or man, 'should have the same rights simply by virtue of being 21 years of age, that we have, after some debate today, decided to give our wives and daughters.' And the legislators did not do so.<sup>32</sup>

While Aborigines who had the vote in the southeastern states ought to have retained this state right, the federal exclusion trumped the states. Not until 1962 did the federal government restore political rights to Aborigines.<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, Australia earned the reputation as a site of progressive policies for women. It was progressive for white women only. Aborigines were declared not to be citizens in the land of their birth and swiftly disappeared from mainstream discussion of rights and entitlements.

There is every reason to expect that most politically aware settler women in New Zealand and the Australian colonies sustained ideas about the political rights of indigenes similar to their male counterparts. A question remains, however, about the stance of the suffrage activists of the WCTU. Such women belonged to a humanitarian tradition and were consistently vocal in their concern for the status of women of colour abroad. At the second national convention of the Australian WCTU in Sydney in 1894, Jessie Ackermann proudly proclaimed: 'Our banner floats in forty-seven lands, and in forty-seven languages can we read our motto "For God and Home and Every Land".'<sup>34</sup> Local members more quietly pointed out that the World's WCTU proved above all else that women of varying ethnicities and races could work together for a common cause. In the 1890s and early 1900s the colonial members were reticent, however, about the political rights of indigenous women. Ackermann herself indicated an explanation for their attitude towards the rights of colonized peoples in *The World Through a Woman's Eyes* when she dedicated it to Richard Pratt, the superintendent of the Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, whom she called the founder of the 'Greatest Educational and Individualizing Enterprise in the World.' She hoped that 'the great possibilities of the Red Man may become better known and a deeper interest awakened in the first natives of our land.'<sup>35</sup> As Christian evangelicals with a heritage of humanitarianism, the local evangelical activists looked to missionaries to look after indigenous peoples' welfare and protection, and they assessed indigenous women and men on the steps they had made in 'progress' towards western educational, religious and cultural norms.

The WCTU suffragists might have wanted to 'uplift' indigenous peoples; they were not usually resistant, however, to settler narratives that legitimated white colonization and expropriation of others' lands. Ackermann's references to the colonies in her book indicated that she, too, had quickly tuned in to settlers' views of the world. Echoing the patronizing attitude of white New Zealanders, she found Maori 'very intelligent, more so I should say than are any of the natives of the South Seas,'<sup>36</sup> by which



she meant that many Maori had adopted aspects of western education, religion, dress and behaviour. She describes as a 'lawless spirit,' 'a dangerous character,' one chief who had continued to resist white settlement. He had 'given the authorities very much trouble'; the new chief who called himself 'King' was, on the contrary, 'peace-loving and law-abiding.'<sup>37</sup> In her later *Australia Through a Woman's Eyes*, Ackermann's sole reference to Aborigines was a photograph depicting on the left a traditional Aboriginal man in a loincloth, spear in hand, and on the right an Aboriginal man in western clothes, standing outside a neat cottage, arm-in-arm with a missionary.<sup>38</sup> *The World Through a Woman's Eyes* describes her visit to Tasmania, where she echoed the veil of silence that settlers drew over the disgraceful near-genocide of Tasmanian Aborigines. Instead, she rehearsed a history of Australia's transition from its miserable convict origins to a bright progressive present.<sup>39</sup>

### Women's suffrage and racial hierarchies in Hawai'i

The women's vote also made its appearance in the 1890s in the political life of Hawai'i and once again Jessie Ackermann's brief observations on her visit and subsequent events are instructive of white colonizers' narratives. The 'natives' of Hawai'i, she found, had made 'great progress' since their language was first transposed into written form. 'Idolatry is now unknown among them, their idols are broken, and their superstitions have given way to enlightenment.'<sup>40</sup> She was gratified to find that many Hawaiians were industrious, lived in neat houses with gardens, and dressed appropriately for preserving modesty in a tropical climate. The American missionaries who first established themselves in the islands in 1820 had clearly set native Hawaiians on a path that met this evangelical visitor's approval.<sup>41</sup> Yet Ackermann found a grave problem in the existence of a Hawaiian King, David Kalākaua, whose methods of government – indeed, whose very royal existence – disturbed her American democratic and republican convictions. She was reduced to sarcasm in describing her audience with the king:

This was my first experience in the presence of real live royalty – a natural-born King – a fellow-creature great because he could not help it – born great. Poor man, how sorry I was for him to be thus burdened! Yet I must nerve myself to gaze upon a sight my eyes had never beheld. How I felt! My democratic, Fourth-of-July principles bore down heavily upon me as I thought of the bowing, scraping and 'backing out' from his natural-born mightiness.<sup>42</sup>

Ackermann's impressions of Kalākaua were not good; he was 'very unpopular among the whites,' she noted, and 'had his days been lengthened, he doubtless would have met the fate of the one who tried to succeed him.'<sup>43</sup>

With these words Ackermann explicitly allied herself with the white, largely American stock community – the haoles – who were at the time of her visit competing with the Hawaiian chiefs for political control. The American camp wanted a special relationship with the United States to protect the sugar trade and business; the chiefs wanted to sustain indigenous political control and respect for Hawaiian dignity and worth. The American residents had recently staged a showdown of power with Kalākaua but backed away from a coup. In 1893 they abandoned their scruples and, with the help of American marines brought ashore from a visiting naval vessel, deposed Kalākaua's successor, Queen Lili'uokalani, and established the short-lived Republic of Hawai'i.<sup>44</sup> In 1898, already involved in fighting Spain in Cuba and the Philippines, the United States Congress agreed to annex Hawai'i as a territory; the promise of a naval base at Pearl Harbour was no small incentive. Ackermann echoed the resident American justification for their imperialism, observing that the natives 'were becoming well educated, the spirit of progress had taken possession of them.' They too were starting to feel that 'the old form of government did not meet the demands of the day, and the rulers were behind in the recognition of the rights of the people.'<sup>45</sup>

The local WCTU women, nearly all of them descendants of or married to descendants of, the first missionaries, similarly declared American progress and liberty good for Hawaiians, and supported their male counterparts in their assumption of power.<sup>46</sup> The leadership of the Hawaiian WCTU, founded in 1884 under Mary Leavitt's guiding hand, had no doubt where their loyalties lay. Mary Greene, daughter of missionaries, and herself the Union Superintendent of Work among the Hawaiians, had applauded the American business group when they challenged Kalākaua in 1887: 'The women of this country owe a debt of deepest gratitude to those who so wisely planned and carried out the political reform,' she had told the WCTU Annual Meeting in 1888. 'All honour to the men who stood bayonet in hand ready to defend the cause.'<sup>47</sup>

Neither did they have qualms about the 1893 coup, or the 'Revolution,' as the Americans called it, harking back to an earlier heroic blow for liberty in 1776. All appeared to concur with men such as Sereno Bishop, editor of the evangelicals' paper, *The Friend*. 'It has been a grand thing to pass through all this exciting and exalting experience,' wrote this descendant of pioneering missionaries. 'Our noble citizens of American and European blood have once more paid homage and devotion to the lofty cause of Liberty and Progress.'<sup>48</sup> WCTU member Emma Smith Dillingham had the grace to concede in a private letter that 'This *must* be the *last* Revolution' (emphasis in original), while she assured her correspondent that the men who had taken over government were filled with 'the desire to further the welfare of the people in every particular.'<sup>49</sup> She clearly discounted the significance of the Hui Aloha Aina (Hawaiian Patriotic League) which sprang into existence in March 1893 to protest

the coup and which had an associated women's branch of over 11,000 members.<sup>50</sup>

The WCTU leaders were swift to grasp that the crisis of the newly proclaimed republic, which would necessitate a rewriting of electoral entitlements, offered an opportunity to gain the vote for women. Having unsuccessfully begged the United States government to annex the islands, the provisional government that took power after the coup convened a constitutional convention to establish the legal basis of their new republic. Early in 1894 the WCTU called a series of well-attended women's meetings to publicize arguments in favour of enfranchising women, forming a Woman Suffrage Committee to meet with the male delegates to the Convention.<sup>51</sup> The gentlemen were more than chivalrous to the women's concerns, but, they asked, were revolutionary times the most favourable for something as radical as the women's vote? As one convention participant declared: 'If all the women who asked for the franchise were of the same class as the committee, there would be no trouble.' But, as another delegate pointed out, all women were not like the suffragists who stood before them. 'We have all factions and degrees of ignorance in this country,' he pleaded. 'We are trying to make a constitution to suit all classes.' Manhood suffrage had existed in the Hawaiian Kingdom since 1850, and he appreciated that the WCTU now rightly pointed out women's claims to equality. But, as Judge Robertson pointed out in opposing the suffrage, if women were enfranchised at this critical juncture the numbers of non-American women would add to the problem of numbers that already existed: 'There were about seven Hawaiian women to one white woman here. This would give a big majority of undesirable votes.' As another delegate put it more crassly: 'It would double up on the ignorant vote.'<sup>52</sup>

At this point the suffrage activists sought a compromise. There was of course no question of a racial bar, given that as humanitarians and evangelicals they did genuinely believe in the potential equality of all races, once appropriately Christianized, educated and accepting of American values. The WCTU activists did, however, entertain an educational bar, or a property qualification, which would have admitted almost all white women and the more privileged of the women of colour. When the Convention rejected even these concessions, the suffrage supporters backed a clause in the new constitution that would enable a government in the future to pass women's suffrage by legislation rather than constitutional amendment. That too was lost. Reporting back to the WCTU, the women consoled themselves with the hope that their actions were 'an entering wedge, and at some future time we expect to have the privilege of helping to make laws which will be for the uplifting of the Nation.'<sup>53</sup>

This moment was a long time coming. The 1898 Organic Act which completed the incorporation of Hawai'i as a Territory of the United States of America similarly excluded women from voting for or serving in the Hawaiian Senate or House of Representatives or from serving as Territor-

ial Delegate to Congress in Washington. Susan B. Anthony was watching the process and vented her anger: 'I have been overflowing with wrath ever since the proposal was made to engraft our half-barbaric form of government on Hawai'i and our other new possessions,' she wrote.

I have been studying how to save, not them, but ourselves, from disgrace. This is the first time the United States has ever tried to foist upon a new people the exclusively masculine form of government. Our business should be to give the people the highest form which has been attained by us.<sup>54</sup>

Not many people were listening. Women in Hawai'i had not received the vote in the 1890s because elite white men feared that doubling the Hawaiian vote would have negative implications for their hope for a prosperous, American business-oriented future. Despite the strong social position of WCTU leaders in Hawaiian society, and their humanitarian convictions on social justice, American pragmatic interests prevailed. The haole women appeared oblivious to the irony entailed in their applause for the republic that removed a queen and other highborn Hawaiian women from positions of authority, while they lamented this same new government's denial of women's suffrage. Their aim was gender equality within a racial hierarchy.

After their early beginning on the path to the suffrage women of US origin, Hawaiian women, and other women of colour in the Hawaiian islands did not receive the vote until 1920, through the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. It is ironic to note Judith Gething's point, that in the early Hawaiian kingdom many women from the high-born chiefly elite not only had an equal say in the legislature but also took seats in the upper house, the House of Nobles. Through American influence they lost their political status, only to be graciously given it back by Americans decades later, in 1920.<sup>55</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Suffrage activists in the new white societies of New Zealand, the Australian colonies, and Hawai'i were liberal in political orientation and heirs to a tradition of evangelical humanitarianism. When they presented their case for women's entry into political rights, they eschewed the racism of many fellow colonists. These women were nevertheless part of a privileged social group who colluded in the creation of an historical narrative that presented colonization in a positive light. It was a version of history that had justified, and continued to justify, differential treatment of indigenous people. When the suffragists' cause reached the platforms of those holding political power, politicians made decisions based on not just the supposed outcomes on gender relations but on the vote's implications for

the colonial project as a whole. They manipulated women's civil rights in ways that would diminish indigenous people's impact on settlers' political dominance.

Thus New Zealand legislators in 1893 were prepared to admit Maori women as well as white women to the vote because Maori women's influence would be contained within pre-existing Maori-only electorates. By contrast, the new Australian Commonwealth legislature proceeded effectively to exclude all Aborigines in the same electoral act that enfranchised white women twenty-one years of age and over. Finally, the American men who wrote the new republican Hawaiian Constitution provided further contrast when they denied both white women and Hawaiian women the vote for fear of destabilizing a finely balanced political compromise. Colonial suffrage campaigns challenged existing codes of gender, certainly, but the politics of race was never far from the surface in legislative resolutions of this debate.

## Notes

- 1 Jessie Ackermann, *The World Through a Woman's Eyes*, Chicago: [n.p.], 1896. An earlier version of this chapter appeared in the *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 69, 4, 2000, 553–72.
- 2 Ackermann, *The World Through a Woman's Eyes*, p. 19.
- 3 Ibid., p. 22.
- 4 Ian Tyrrell, *Woman's World, Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880–1930*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.
- 5 See Janet Zollinger Giele, *Two Paths to Women's Equality: Temperance, Suffrage and the Origins of Modern Feminism*, New York: Twayne, 1995; Ruth Bordin, *Frances Willard: A Biography*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986; Suzanne M. Marilley, *Woman Suffrage and the Origins of Modern Feminism in the United States, 1820–1920*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.
- 6 Ackermann, *The World Through a Woman's Eyes*, p. 119.
- 7 Ibid., p. 140.
- 8 For general histories see: Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1999; James Belich, *Making Peoples: A History of the New Zealanders, From Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century*, Auckland: Penguin, 1996; Gavan Daws, *Shoal of Time: A History of the Hawaiian Islands*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1968.
- 9 See Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874–1939*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- 10 See Majorie Spruill Wheeler (ed.), *One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement*, Troutdale: New Sage, 1995.
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